

“Going Transnational”:
Politics of Transnational Feminist Exchange and Discourse in/between India
and the United States
by
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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved February 2013 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2013

ABSTRACT

This study compares some sites, structures, theories and praxis of transnational feminisms in India and the U.S., simultaneously guided by and interrogating contemporary academic feminist theoretical and methodological trends. The goal is twofold: to understand similarities and differences in feminist praxis of two geo-epistemological spaces; and to interrogate the notion and currency of the "transnational" within feminist knowledge-creation. The phenomenon of transnational feminist knowledge-making is interrogated from a philosophical/theoretical and phenomenological/experiential standpoint. The philosophical inquiry is concentrated on the theoretical texts produced on transnational/global/postcolonial feminisms. This inquiry also focuses on some unpublished, uncirculated archival materials that trace the history of academic feminisms and their transnationalization. The phenomenological side focuses on interview and survey data on transnational feminism, gathered from feminist practitioners working in the U.S. and India, as well as being "transmigrant," or "traveling scholars." Digital/institutional ethnography is used to ground the findings in operational spaces of knowledge-making, including cyberspace. This research shows that the global logic of circulation and visibility organize the flow of knowledge as data, narratives and reports from the global south, which are analyzed, clarified and theorized in the global north. Perhaps responding to many critiques on "speaking of" and "speaking for" the "other," the trend to represent third world women as perpetual victims has given way to newer representations and accounts of resistance, collaboration, and activism. However, this creates a fresh "theory-here-activism-there" model of transnational feminism that

preserves unequal feminist division of labor. This comparative and critical study focuses not just on feminist discourses in two countries but also their relationships, suggests some viable models of transnational feminism that can preserve epistemic justice, and aims to contribute to the theoretical corpus of transnational feminism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to record my gratitude and appreciation for the people that made this dissertation possible. I start by thanking my interviewees and everyone that facilitated my ethnographies by allowing me time and access. I am grateful to countless feminist researchers and activists worldwide who are deeply devoted to social justice work. Some of them, my interviewees, did not merely provide “data,” but also helped me create my arguments and theses, as much as the cited researchers on whose shoulders I stand.

My intellectual debt to my dissertation committee chair Prof. Sally L. Kitch is substantial. She taught me feminist theory and the value of interdisciplinarity and pushed me relentlessly to better myself, and create a dissertation I could be proud of. Next, I thank my committee members, Profs. Mary Margaret Fonow and Ann Hibner Koblitz. The former trained me in much more than research; she taught me the value of staying calm and composed in the face of challenges. She encouraged me to co-publish with her and remained supportive of my professional and personal endeavors. Prof. Koblitz is a great teacher and mentor; she took my success personally and always provided candid opinion of my work. Together, my committee members trained me through my years of coursework, comprehensive examinations, proposal and doctoral defenses, and my job searches. I thank them deeply.

Past and present faculty members in my program—Lisa Anderson, Elizabeth Archuleta, Jill Fisher, Georganne Scheiner, Heather Switzer and Michelle M. Vlahoulis—remained positive and encouraging always. I am grateful to every teacher that

trained me in and out of classrooms, who led by example. I also want to record my appreciation for my mentors in India: Profs. Sujata Patel and Sharmila Rege.

Friends in my cohort are indispensable to me. We stick to each other in times of happiness and success, strife and crisis. Alicia Woodbury, as a friend, colleague, housemate and officemate supported me ceaselessly. Tiffany Lamoureux is an ally, always there for me, always helpful and compassionate. Mary Jatau taught me how to never give up especially when life becomes unforgiving and demanding. Friends outside my cohort that I am truly grateful to are Elena Frank, Monamie Bhadra Haines and Shreya Bhattacharya. Elena and I remain perfect colleagues and close friends. Monamie and Shreya sustained me through my trials and tribulations, with good humor and ever-charming company.

Speaking of friends, I had the good fortune to marry one and make him my life partner. My gratitude to Nate- Dr. Nathan Toké- is of a different order. He knows what it is to be an academic, and has supported me with lots of love, care and consideration. His companionship makes my life interesting and beautiful.

Grants, fellowships and funding support from the Women and Gender Studies Program, School of Social Transformation, Graduate College, and Graduate and Professional Student Association at Arizona State University; National Women's Studies Association, and the Nita Hardie Fellowship Award Endowment have supported my research, for which I am truly grateful.

I warmly thank the administrative staff in the School of Social Transformation—Jane Little, Tami McKenzie, Kathleen Given, Roisan Rubio, Candace Matheus, Maureen Roen, Nancy Winn and our student workers—for making my life easier.

In the inevitable spirit of taking-for-granted, I mention my immediate family in India towards the end of this statement of acknowledgement. I am who I am because of them. My mother, Indira Chakravarty (Mukherjee) is central to my existence. My father Ajit Prasad Chakravarty taught me how to be brave. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, in recognition of years and years of support—even when they did not agree with me but always believed in me—in recognition of their picking up my pieces and grounding me. They, along with my younger and only sister Sarbani Chakravarty, who always parented me a little, form my forever support system. My grandparents Jayati Mukherjee, J.P. Chakravarty, and B. C. Mukherjee were my very first teachers. I lost two of them while being away in two different graduate schools but take comfort in knowing that they are proud of me.

I am also grateful to the following wonderful people for their friendship: Addy Bareiss, Ahonaa Roy, Carolyn Garland, Charlie Zhang, Dolma Roder, Jenni Ernst, Lipika Sharma, Meredith Clark, Nan Carmichael, Nandini Dhar, Prabuddha Dasgupta, Sadia Mahmood, Sammit Khandeparkar, Sandeep Ray, Sarah Suhail, Smita Gopal and Suchi Banerjee. There are some that I might have missed naming, but I haven't forgotten any act of love and support directed towards me. Kajaal, Kona and Dallas—animal friends who make my life joyful—deserve a special mention too.

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to “Going Transnational”: Politics of Transnational Feminist

Exchange and Discourse in/between India and the United States

My dissertation is a theoretical and on-the-ground exploration of transnational feminism, as it rapidly becomes central to academic feminist discourse in the United States and elsewhere. Through my comparative analysis of contemporary feminist epistemologies in India and the United States I explore the following basic research questions: What IS transnational feminism? What does that modifier do to feminism in theory and practice? What is being transcended, although location limited by borders obviously remains central to political and epistemological agency? Is this concept useful to feminisms and feminist practitioners of the global south as compared to the widespread academic enthusiasm it has generated in the global north? The last question becomes particularly important in the context of claims of dialogue and collaboration between feminists of the global north and the global south, or between the one-thirds and two-thirds world—claims expressed and assumed in a growing body of literature on transnational feminisms.

My focus on transnational feminism derives from the desire to interrogate the current discursive trends in this expanding subfield. Two trends initially caught my attention. First, literature on transnational or global feminisms and women seem to be going through a transition, where third world women are initially typecast and constructed as victims, which authors such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Uma Narayan critiqued in their writings in late 1980s and 1990s.

Then comes the phase of transnational feminism where third world women are represented as agents, and resisters, of local, national and global oppressive policies and structures. J.K. Gibson-Graham's (1996, 2006) works on global political economy and Myra M. Marx and Aili M. Tripp's (2006) work on global feminisms exemplify this trend, and there are many other similar examples focusing on women's lives and gender issues vis-à-vis current globalization. This trend is by no means replaced by the current trend of casting women in spaces of the global south as transnational feminist collaborators. Amanda Swarr and Richa Nagar's work, including their edited anthology published in 2010, embody this. The centrality of collaboration has emerged as a given in transnational feminism and I wanted to investigate the meaning of that. Second, I wanted to investigate what seemed like noticeable silences on several issues in transnational feminist discussions: ranging from the role of theory, to role of communication technologies in transnationalizing U.S. academic feminisms. In the course of my research I uncover several other trends belonging in the realms of feminist epistemology and pedagogy.

Tentatively claiming a transmigrant/new subaltern feminist position, I critically examine the transformative value of transnationalism in feminist scholarship. Transnational feminism embodies a culture of disclosure, of self-reflexivity, of expanded discussions of "positionality," the politics and implications of the author's identity. I have tried to explain my positionality where relevant and also shown that prevalent disclosures of author's/authority's positionality within current transnational feminist texts often display a selective nature, leaving out discussions of identity, privilege and/or epistemic

motive that are important to feminist politics and epistemic justice. Being a transmigrant (someone who has the privilege to go back and forth between two or more geo-political spaces) is central to a postcolonial as well as transnational (feminist and other kinds of) experience: a point that is reiterated in subaltern studies but not so much in transnational feminist literature. Being a new subaltern means embodying the kind of subalternity where the older definition of one who historically has the least access to social mobility and capital does not work. The new subaltern, while being subject to hegemony and intersectional marginalization, especially as a subject of knowledge and epistemic agent, still has relative access, permeability and “voice.” These advantages and disadvantages derive from location in a certain matrix of class, age, gender, nationality and access to real and symbolic systems of language and networks (Spivak 1988, 1996, 1999).

I observe, as some scholars have before me, that “transnational” can be collapsed with “international” and/or “multicultural”—embodying and representing the insidious inequities of globalization and neo-liberalism. This collapse might replicate the conceptual and practical flaws of global and international feminisms, earlier versions and movements of “outward looking” or ecumenical feminisms that attempted to incorporate “plural” perspectives and voices. I explore ways in which such slippages can be circumvented through studying feminist projects being undertaken currently that claim or disclaim transnational tendency. These projects range from curriculum building to PhD dissertations in women’s/gender/feminist studies—from transnational collaborative projects to transnational circulation of discourses on gendered globalization. Thus, this study is also about mapping multiple feminist interventions in seemingly post-feminist

global societies where ideologies of the “post” and the “transcendent,” such as those shared between unequal worlds (first/third), differently located spaces (north/south) and incongruent historical identities (colonizer/colonized) might be problematic and disempowering. The transnational turn in feminism might also reproduce the problematic of multiculturalism where institutional demands for diversity produced various forms of tolerances and accommodations for “other cultures” and difference became an issue to be effectively “managed.” Scholars such as Chowdhury (2009), Moallem (2006), Mohanty (2003), Spivak (1999), Nagar (2002) and Narayan (1997) have discussed these problems—of representation and rights— of the “other.”

My aim is to continue this discussion as well as look for effective ways to deal with these problems and create a measure of epistemic justice. I look at the ways in which feminist knowledge is being created in India and the U.S. in the present, and attempt to understand the state of academic feminism after the “transnational turn,” and the politics of transnational feminist exchange. My research compares some sites, structures, theories and praxis of transnational feminisms in India and the U.S., simultaneously guided by and interrogating contemporary transnational feminist theoretical and methodological schema. My goal is twofold: to understand similarities and differences in feminisms of two geo-epistemological spaces through a transnational feminist lens; and to interrogate the notion and currency of the “transnational” within feminist knowledge creation both in United States and India. This comparative study focuses not just on feminist currents in two countries but also their relationships— and this critical mapping of feminist synapses and connections in a shape-shifting

contradictions-ridden global civil society will hopefully contribute to the theoretical corpus of transnational feminism.

Why even choose “transnational feminist” as a lens to understand comparative feminist epistemology? I would like to point out that just as I cannot choose globalization or choose not to be globalized, in spite of the glaring attendant problems, it seems impossible to understand feminist epistemology at this historical juncture without taking a comparative, cross-national or transnational view. While nations and regions and households remain important as ever in understanding feminisms and gendered processes, globalization and international relations shape the conventional workings of modernity, in turn being shaped by borders and bound spaces. Academic feminism in India has been internationalized or transnationalized as well, just as in the U.S., and there are varied expressions and paradigms of transnational feminist engagements there, that I believe to be important to understand, and critique, and apply the frameworks on transnational feminisms here. I call the U.S. *here*, because I am currently located here, as are almost all current and visible scholars of transnational feminism.

Why look for the “transnational” in India and use it as a comparative/contrasting geo-epistemological space? My aim is to de-center and re-center transnational feminist discourses from their foundational academic spaces of the global north, as well as ground and interrogate the notion of place. Re-centering might be a good strategy, to shift the theoretical center of transnational feminism away from U.S./Canadian articulations of it, to another site that often remains as the absent referent. India seems to be not just the absent referent but also a representative site of feminist knowledge creation responding to

other transnational processes unleashed by a deepening globalization that reshapes democracy, political economies, civil societies and the nation state itself.

Within what is known as third world feminism in some academic locations in India and U.S. third world feminism in some similar locations in the U.S., place emerges as a very important parameter of experience and knowledge (Ang 1995, Anzaldúa 1987, Sandoval 2000, Mani & Frankenberg 1993). Not looking at India would constitute making a substantial “referent space” invisible. Geography is not just about places but also processes. I use the term “geo-epistemological” to explain the salience of geographical location in knowledge-making, just as geopolitical focuses on the importance and relationship between nations and regional powers. Transnational feminists seem to be interested in cartographies of labor, immigration, social movements, epistemologies and many other processes, omitting a cartography of transnational feminism itself: of the idea, its fragmentation, spread and implications. Pervasive globalization does not reduce the importance of space and place, especially while making encounter and politics of encounter possible and complicated.

I focus on curriculum and pedagogy as a way to understand transnational feminism. Scholars such as Mohanty and Alexander connect transnational feminism to globalization and believe that curricular analysis paves a way to understanding hierarchies of place and space. “If to talk about space is to talk about geography, then to talk about geography is also to talk about land and the fierce contestation over lands that are at the center of both neoimperial and colonial land appropriation” (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010, 39). They also ask “...in what ways do syllabi bend or reinforce

normative cartographic rules?” I have looked at fifty graduate syllabi from Indian and US universities representing “core” or compulsory courses, suggesting that the knowledge mapped in such syllabi would guide and shape new feminist research. Through discourse analysis of interview data (interviews with feminist researchers, publishers and archivists), research publications and contemporary feminist writings in India, through understanding of the centrality of the new media and the ways in which it is harnessed for feminist collaboration, I attempt to contribute a notion of critical transnational feminist ideal-types and strategic identity politics to feminist epistemology, feminist future studies and field development (of women’s/gender/feminist studies).

What I researched could be labeled as “feminist encounters: locating the politics of experience” (Mohanty 2010), where politics of location and difference, and indifference seems to have been central to the feminist imaginaries in the U.S. Mohanty calls for interrogating the notion of cross-cultural, through the politics of experience. She examines the contentious task of “theorizing experience.” Even the best works on feminist organizing and international women’s movements seem to have considered women as cross-culturally singular. Mohanty calls for historicizing experience and calls for a politics of engagement as opposed to a politics of transcendence. I am taking up this politics of engagement as a central claim made in transnational feminist theories to search for its material, day to day instances that I locate in some sites in India. I am claiming my engagement with those sites as politics of engagement, politics of location (of theory, of feminisms, of historical specificity). In explanation to “why India”...I am averring that India has remained prominently visible in the discourse of transnational feminism,

through identities of core theorists, as site(s) of inquiry, as a site of comparison in cross-cultural or cross-national research projects on whose critique/success the “transnational turn” in U.S. academic feminism has come into being. Deliberate political practice of separating the “transnational” from “global” or “multicultural” or “international” seems to be predicated on ideas of collaborative writing, research and theoretical collaborations. Yet, there seems to be a silence or a “lack” when it comes to studying or applying theories of transnational feminism or even feminisms from other spaces, such as those produced or circulated in India.

Two canonical essays have influenced my analysis of transnational feminism as a new mode of representing and researching the “other,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and Chandra Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes,” both published in 1988. Many consider these essays germinal to transnational feminist teaching and scholarship, as caveats, slap on the wrists of global, international or third world feminisms. Spivak, Mohanty, and many feminist writers loosely located in the field of transnational feminism take western feminism(s) to task for essentializing the indigenous, colonized subject as perpetually oppressed, without any agency and for relegating third world feminisms to a realm of developmental rather than epistemological concern. These authors identify colonial “representation” as a central transnational feminist issue. However, Minoo Moallem’s work on “transnationalization or “internationalization” of women’s studies bring forth issues of knowledge-making, “nation and modernity, which are helpful to explain the genealogy of transnational feminism. Moallem (2006, 332) states:

The mainstream assumption about internationalization is that it is the spread of knowledge that is produced in the West and consumed in various parts of the world. The genealogy of such views of internationalization along with notions of universalism are inseparable from the project of colonial modernity in its desire not only to know about "the state of the populations," in Foucauldian terms in order to discipline them, but also to spread the values of a rational model of knowledge production in its venture of modernizing, civilizing, and developing the traditional, the uncivilized, and the under developed.

This "spread" of hegemony as a direct result of the one way flow of written discourses and texts is something I have tried to capture in my discussion on self-repeating structures of knowledge. This is one of the many silent processes of the political economy of transnational feminism. Another characteristic seems to be theoretical critique of several non-academic, NGO-ized discourses such as gender mainstreaming. A lot of these US critiques do not go down well with feminist-activist-researchers in India who feel that critiques of a form of governmental or non-governmental intervention as capitalist, or neoliberal, or "problematic" is a critique from an insulated position of privilege (something I call POP critique). These POP critiques coming from researchers, theoreticians or academics with no real experience or understanding of gender realities in India serve to further colonize, devalue and "reform" Indian feminist interventions and negotiations.

I use "U.S." as an adjective-prefix in the dissertation to talk about the situation in the geo-epistemological space of the United States. This seemed a more acceptable and correct expression than "American." For the Indian context, I have used "Indian feminist(s)" or "Indian academia" despite the homogenizing and nationalizing flaws associated with such a possessive, indicating "of" or "belonging" to a space. However,

sometimes my interviewees have described themselves as Indian (feminists, or academics or activists) and I do not want to impose my poststructural critique of “Indian” or similar possessive forms on their speech acts. If “Indian” has hegemonic potential, so does “feminist”, and feminist criticism opens our mind to such slippages in language. Yet, the qualifier, or adjective or prefix “Indian” can also be used in the simplest sense of being “present” or located in India, in claiming a political identity, in reclaiming the transformative potential of a long struggling postcolonial neocolonial democracy. I wanted to make my position clear on my interchanging use of “Indian” and “in India.” This same thinking permeates my own and my interviewees’ use of “U.S.” as an adjective, before “imperialism” or “feminism.”

Methods and Methodology

In this dissertation, I have investigated theory and praxis of transnational feminism from philosophical/theoretical and phenomenological/experiential perspectives. The philosophical inquiry is concentrated on the theoretical texts produced on transnational, postcolonial, poststructural and postmodern “turns” in feminist theory. I argue that the three latter turns have created the foundation for the emergence of transnational feminisms and represent trends that precipitated after some feminists started re-thinking the public sphere and feminist engagements vis-à-vis globalization and post-nationalism. I have chosen critical discourse analysis (CDA) as my preferred method of symptomatic reading of foundational texts on transnational feminism.¹ CDA involves interpretation of three dimensions of discourses: “i) its manifestation in linguistic form (in the form of

¹ Symptomatic reading is a notion I borrow from Althusser, it is a form of close reading (like Althusser read Marx) to recover the basic structure of concepts, and layers of secondary and new meanings.

‘texts’)’ ii) its instantiation of a social practice (political, ideological and so on); and iii) its focus on the socially constructed processes of production, distribution and consumption which determine how texts are made, circulated and used.” (Locke 2004, 8). CDA is analytical because it involves a detailed systematic examination with a view to arriving at one or more underlying principles, in this case of transnationalism as well as feminism and their interface. It is discourse oriented because discursive formations are an instrument as well as effect of power.

I have traced discursive formations of transnational feminism through studying key texts (books and journal articles), speeches, addresses and debates (in conferences and other public spaces of engagement), job postings for faculty and researchers proficient in transnational feminisms, graduate and undergraduate course syllabi. Such materials originating in the US and India are often able to explain the matrices of power that underlie transnational feminist discourse. CDA is important because “a central outcome of the act of analysis is to enable consideration of the social effects of the meanings a reader is being positioned or called upon to subscribe to in the act of reading, and the contestation of these meanings” (Locke 2004, 10). This notion is close to Spivak’s (1999) “implied readership” that must fill a certain subject(ive) position to be able to access the text and receive the intended meaning.

The phenomenological side focuses on interview and survey data on transnational feminism. I have conducted twenty-five unstructured but themed in-depth interviews. My interviewees are nine academic researchers from India (women’s studies professors, sociologists, political scientists, historians doing feminist research, some of them have

held visiting positions in the U.S.)- six of them are heads of women's studies academic units, including schools, departments and centers. One is a professor of women's studies in the University of California system, who identifies as a transnational feminist, now on a sabbatical in India. I have also interviewed ten researchers located in extra academic spaces in India, in small autonomous research centers that are involved, or have been historically involved in feminist/women's movements and now are involved in carrying out research projects, publications, campaigns and other forms of activism. In addition, I have interviewed two women's studies publishers (owners of autonomous presses that publish books on feminist/women's history, feminist economics, history, oral histories, geography and literature), as well as four publishers and organizers of cyberfeminist websites that are creating and engaging with transnational feminist discourse.

Why phenomenology? I have shown in the course of my research that one of the epistemic issues arising in transnational feminism involves the "theory-here-activism-there" phenomenon whereby experiences and narratives of collaborators and research subjects in the global south are brought back to the global north for purposes of analysis and theorization. To avoid this phenomenon present in transnational feminist, or indeed *any* ethnography, I have decided to deal with experience in a manner whereby some of the work of analysis and theorization are done by my respondents themselves. "The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience. . .the aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a

comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas 1994, 13). This approach to phenomenology is somewhat different from the psychological approach of Edmund Husserl (1964) and Alfred Schtuz (1970), whose work provides my initial training in this method. Instead I use phenomenology as a method of reflexivity, something that puts experience as central to understanding of social worlds and co-construction of knowledges. Phenomenology has been used in this way by feminist researchers and can be particularly useful in interviews (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2012).

I have conducted ethnographies and archival research to generate data that can be analyzed phenomenologically. I visited six archives that are parts of research centers (they are also sometimes called “documentation centers” and have lending libraries) that are repositories of feminist and other movement texts, including academic publications. Many of these publications are important documents of social history and regional research, yet one-time, obscure, often what is known as “ephemeral,” existing outside the political economy of academic publication. I looked for ways in which the “transnational” figures in feminist discourses arising and circulating in Indian urban feminist spaces of knowledge-creation. I also did some ethnography in research centers that do not have archives, but do produce independent publications and field projects.

These places are: *Aalochana* in Pune; *Anveshi* and *Shaheen* in Hyderabad; Center for Education and Documentation (CED), Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women (SPARROW), and SNTD Women’s Center in Bombay that houses the Indian Association Women’s Studies’ (IAWS) archives; *Jagori*, and Center for Women’s Development Studies (CWDS) in New Delhi; Jadavpur University women’s studies

library and archive, and *Parichitee* in Calcutta. I participated in meetings and informal sessions of these organizations in order to understand how globalization, collaboration and transnationalism figures in the conversation about organizational policies as well as current areas of research and activism focus. In addition I did digital ethnography of four websites concerned with gender-justice: *Manushi*, Countercurrents, Blank Noise and Ultraviolet.

I acquired current feminist publications from India not in circulation in U.S. academia that would help me understand comparative feminist theories and imaginaries surrounding globalization, collaboration and other transnational connections that shape knowledge making. These materials were important to my overall goal of discourse analysis. In addition, I looked at issues of the *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, *Manushi*, and *Economic and Political Weekly*, three journals that carry women's studies scholarship from India, from the last five years. I also examined issues of *Signs*, *Meridians*, *Frontiers*, *Feminist Teacher*, and *Feminist Formations* (formerly *NWSA Journal*) over the same time span to understand the circulation and reception of transnational feminist discourse.

I have also used data from a survey I created on transnational feminism that asks feminists and women's studies practitioners questions on transnational feminism, especially about their understanding of and experience with this branch of feminist scholarship/epistemology. Some of these questions were open ended, where respondents typed in and explained their perspectives. I received a hundred responses in all.

Chapter Organization

Chapter one focuses on the genealogy of transnational feminism as an idea situated in US academic discourse. Through close reading of key texts it becomes clear that three epistemological breaks, or turns in feminist, literary and social theories hastened the creation of a transnational feminist discourse. It is important to understand its location in the U.S. and the moment in history in which it emerged. In the post 9/11 era of transnational tension and questions about migration, borders and identities, academic feminism felt a need of paradigm change, and the older articulations of “beyond the borders” frameworks such as global or international feminisms were called into question. While transnational feminism (which is widely known as “U.S. third world feminism” in India) attempts to correct historical and epistemological fallacies, it remains deeply entrenched within corporatist neo-colonial structures aligned with the university, in line with the university’s desire for diversity and global preparedness.

Chapter two compares feminist epistemologies in India and the United States to understand better the differences and similarities of discourse, signification systems and languages that frame transnational feminism in these two different geo-epistemological spaces. This chapter also compares the ways in which feminist knowledge is produced, circulated and consumed in these two spaces and how such knowledge production responds to imperatives of nation and globalization.

Chapter three focuses on the politics of transnational feminist collaboration. It investigates both the logic of globalization and of cross national collaboration, two processes central to transnational feminism. Globalization needs to be investigated as

central to transnational feminism. A critical analysis of transnationalism (in feminist and other discourses) as a logic of “ordering” and hierarchy seems to be missing from transnational feminist discourse, as are the problematics of “collaboration” and “alliance.” Most collaboration that has happened has placed researchers in India in the position of “non-theoretical partners.” Collaboration often reinforces the hierarchies of theory-praxis or activism/academia. This chapter investigates both critiques and strategies of collaboration that exist between movements and academia, between researchers in autonomous research centers and researchers who are professors or graduate students within the university. Transnational collaboration emerges as a process of constant negotiation and uneasy alliances, and accounts of such collaborations give rise to richer, fuller accounts of national, transnational and regional issues (including gender/transgender issues and realities of surviving within a densely populated city).

Chapter four researches the Internet as “tactical media” that makes the “transnational” in feminism possible. It includes data from three spaces of India-based cyberfeminist engagement as well as forums of U.S.-based transnational feminism in order to compare how virtual collaboration and alliances work and can be imagined as a possible model of critical transnational feminist commitment. The new media emerges as a space, subject and methodology of research and a material condition of any transnationality.

The fifth and final chapter provides examples from my own research and that of others to arrive at a possible model of transnational feminist research. It also brings together themes, critiques and possibilities of transnational feminism that I gathered in

the course of research to conjecture the place and implications of transnational feminism within the field of feminism, and feminist future studies.

It is also worth noting the questions and explanations of methodology are woven into these chapters and are not discussed separately, except for the necessary outlining of the methods in this introduction. Some of the research questions and the answers I gather definitely belong in the realm of feminist epistemology, methodology and pedagogy, hence this interweaving.

Chapter 2

Signifying and Situating the Transnational

On May 18, 2005, some feminist researchers gathered around a table in Los Angeles to discuss the challenges and possibilities of a new and exciting area of women's/gender studies, namely "transnational feminism." Organized by Ellen Dubois, professor of history at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), this roundtable featured the following speakers: speakers Nayereh Tohidi, associate professor of Women's Studies at California State University, Northridge; Spike Peterson, professor in Political Science at the University of Arizona; Maylei Blackwell, assistant professor in Chicano Studies at UCLA; and Leila Rupp, professor of and head of Women's Studies at University of California, Santa Barbara. In this discussion, the researchers acknowledged that transnational feminism was gaining enough academic gravity and presence so that feminist researchers needed to understand what it meant, represented and did to women's studies.

Ellen Dubois stated:

This roundtable is meant to prepare us, all of us, for subsequent work on a phenomenon which exists both in the real world and in the academy, which is the tremendous growth and development in something that we can call transnational or global or international feminism. What we're going to do at this roundtable is examine this phenomenon and the scholarly, academic attention to it, but do so by trying to understand the different ways we approach and the different things we mean by and the different things we learn about this subject, transnational feminism, on the basis of the different intellectual tools that we use. My sense is that, although there is a great deal of interest, activity, and writings about this, not all of it speaks in the same language.²

² See notes from "Transnational Feminism: A Range of Disciplinary Perspectives" (2005) for more. Roundtable held in Royce Hall, UCLA.

In this description of an academic performance, scholars, from elite universities talk to each other about a new, exciting, contentious, complex “turn” and “term” in feminism, a turn that will and does affect research agendas, funds, and worldviews halfway across the world. There have been many more roundtables, workshops and conferences in preparation of transnational feminism, engaging in many debates about what it is, or can be. Academic feminism in the US, judging by contemporary research, pedagogy and hiring trends, seems to have been irreversibly transnationalized.³

The purpose of my research is to interrogate this turn, understand its implications, investigate its material conditions, and examine related structures of power, epistemic agency, economic and discursive exchanges. Through this research I wish to discover another language, or possibly many languages and approaches for, what Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar, editors of a recent anthology on transnational feminism, call “critical transnational feminist praxis.” I want to map another or possibly many modes of “doing” transnational feminism in feminist spaces outside of the United States. Why outside? Does such an “outside” exist? Coming from a transnational and postcolonial feminist position, the answer is “yes.” This “outside” exists in empirical research as well as feminist collective imaginary; it exists, but it is not delimited by space or signification. I argue that investigating this outside will help expand the discourse and dismantle any

³ Among other evidence of this transnationalization: I consider the number of articles and essays on transnational feminism, or using the framework. Term search (Boolean) and quick skimming, in feminist/gender/women’s studies journals reveal the following numbers between 2000-2012- Signs: 350; Feminist Formations (formerly NWSA Journal):87; Women’s Studies: 64; Women’s Studies Quarterly: 22; Meridians: 6. Most of these instances of transnational feminist scholarship are from the last five years, showing an increase in the rate of spread. Analysis of abstracts from all dissertations and theses produced in women’s/gender/sexuality/feminist studies reveals about half of them covering transnational or international topics. Forty-five percent of all women’s studies job posting in the US for the last five years wanted a teacher/researcher whose (main or desirable) focus was transnational feminism.

hegemony in the making. The purpose of this chapter is to situate theoretically what transnational feminism is, what some of the epistemological “breaks” and “turns” are in western feminist scholarship that produces it, and whether it can be considered a distinct feminist epistemology.

At the aforementioned transnational feminist academic performance in 2005, Dubois and several other feminists attempted to uncover or discover a transnational feminist “language.” Spike Peterson talked about what it means to be a transnational feminist in her own discipline, political science. Leila Rupp expressed honest concern about the problem of multiple languages one encounters while doing research. This problem of language barriers has seemed to plague transnational feminist ethnographers from the U.S. for a long time. Of course, “transnational feminism” can present linguistic and conceptual barrier to non-U.S. feminists, who are inserted in the performances and discourses, as subject, content, and collaborators of that very kind of feminism. “Language” being a “code” or a system of symbols, I hypothesize and discover in the course of my research that there are codes and systems devised by actors who remain the silent “signified” or silent references of transnational feminism often located outside the U.S. academia or U.S. borders: always present in discourses, marked by imposed passivity, their presence always mediated by a specific body of theories.

These theories, derived from western academic feminisms’ interface with conventional disciplinary frameworks and methods, present, represent and recreate these references and actors. To understand the relative agency or powerlessness of references and actors theorized into U.S. transnational feminism, the theories and their sources must

be excavated. These references and actors could be the “paid research workers” from “Red Thread,” a Guyanese women’s organization studied by Linda Peake and Karen De Souza (2010), or the LGBTQ community members present in Sam Bullington’s and Amanda Swarr’s correspondence, as collaborators and interviewees— published as an article in the anthology *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*. Studying this anthology is important for any current work on transnational feminism because it serves a circumscriptive purpose, a culmination of “the genealogy of the transnational and its usage in two decades of feminist knowledge production in the Global North” (Swarr and Nagar 2010, 207).

The subjects of transnational and global feminisms often do not get to have their say in U.S. academic performances and publications. What do these “subjects” and “agents” of global feminism, now understood as “collaborators” in transnational feminism, by their own admission, have to say about the processes and frameworks and approaches of transnational feminism? What would be their devised symbolic “codes” and frameworks and articulations of transnational feminism, if they could be heard from? Through a theoretical discussion on subjectivity and epistemology I want to compare these varied languages and to arrive at ways of performing and perceiving transnational feminisms that live up to its claims of collaboration and criticality.⁴

In that round table of 2005, transnational feminism was conceptually separated from “international” or “global sisterhood” although it was indeed an “outgrowth” of the

⁴ I do not do the work of comparison alone. In the process of understanding and deconstructing transnational feminist collaboration I engage in it, asking my academic feminist interviewees situated in the global south to read and comment on some of the canonical texts on transnational feminism. These “reading” and “speaking” subjects have helped me formulate my ideas on emergence and effects of transnational feminism.

latter.⁵ There was articulation of solidarity around feminist issues, although such solidarity was more complex than a mere notion of peaceful sisterhood. Critique and interrogation of this “sisterhood” as homogenizing, as well as of capitalism and globalization as new patriarchies, were deemed necessary by the speakers. They also suggested that there seemed to be little basis for solidarity as desired by varied prevalent articulations of transnational feminism. By inference then, critiques of capitalism and globalization could be or become such a basis. Global capitalism creates a situation for the transnational mobilization of women and provides an opportunity for “new forms of collaboration” between feminist scholars.

There was concern about a big gap between transnational feminist theory and transnational feminist praxis, although what could be done to reduce or fill this gap remained unnamed. The scholars unequivocally saw themselves as doing work “on” transnational feminist movements, mobilizations and histories. The following sentence spoken by Maylei Blackwell drew applause: “It's an exciting time to be thinking and writing and researching about interconnecting these large, macro processes of global political economy to daily lived reality. And we're in a really exciting time politically where social movements are already doing this work if we can keep up with them.”⁶

The scholars labeled their work as fieldwork, as “women of color work,” as feminist theorization work. These labels and categories align with most transnational feminist work that has been done so far. While that brings up the problematic of what I

⁵ Tohidi, 2005, in *Transnational Feminism: A Range of Disciplinary Perspectives: Notes from roundtable on TF at UCLA* organized by Ellen Dubois.

⁶ Blackwell, 2005, in *Transnational Feminism: A Range of Disciplinary Perspectives: Notes from roundtable on transnational feminism at UCLA* organized by Ellen Dubois.

call the academic feminist division of labor, of “theory north, practice south,” it does provide a model to work with and interrogate, and it does make feminist exchange somewhat “transnational.” This model comes up again and again in my research, in the articulations of feminists here and in India, as something inevitable, much like globalization itself that reinforces gendered, classed and spatial division of labor.

However there is also a sense of working around global and U.S. imperatives. In recent articulations of transnational feminisms, this gap of theory and praxis, or academic and activist work seems to have become smaller, where academic work is positioned as critical transnational feminist praxis, or as collaborations that “consciously combine struggles for sociopolitical justice with feminist research methodologies, thereby extending the meanings and scope of transnational feminist theory and practice” (Swarr and Nagar 2010, 13). This decreasing of the theory-praxis gap, where theorization and academic writing is positioned as “praxis” serves a rhetorically curative purpose without doing much to upset the division of labor (theory/praxis, activism/academism) apple cart.

A lot of transnational feminist collaborations happen around tables and in panels, in workshops and classrooms located in western academia. *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, the anthology, comes out of a workshop on transnational feminist praxis at the University of Minnesota in the fall of 2006. Umbrella organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Social Forum (WSF) become sites of transnational feminism (Desai 2005, Franzway and Fonow 2011). The fate and realities of woman and women, worldwide, but especially located in the global south or the third world, as

content but not creators of knowledge continue to remain the foci of varied forms of transnational feminisms. In fact,

The word ‘woman’ has been taken for granted by the United Nations, ever since the beginning of the large scale women’s conferences. In the domain of gendered intervention, today’s United Nations is indeed international. Within a certain broadly defined group of the world’s women, with a certain degree of flexibility in class and politics, the assumptions of a sex-gender system, an unacknowledged biological determination of behaviour, and an object-choice scenario defining female life (children or public life? Population control or ‘development?’), are shared at least as common currency. I begin to think it is a discursive formation, and oppositions can be generated within it (Spivak 2000, 327).

Writings on transnational feminism become politico-intellectual-economic enterprises, striving to de-center politics, expand intellectual boundaries and create a field of specialization and focus in academic/research occupations. In the global north, most of the research on the transnational feminist subject, the “woman” or the girl child, happen under the tutelage of academia, funded by internal and external grants. “Collaboration” emerges as the methodology of choice; postcolonial, post structural and feminist standpoint as preferred theoretical apparatus. When I discuss the politics of collaboration in chapter 3, I will focus mainly on collaborative research projects between feminists of the global north and global south.

Whose “Activism?” What Praxis? What is new?

Somehow, I couldn’t stop picturing these U.S. roundtables and workshops as I sat around and across tables of various shapes and sizes from my interviewees in India, discussing their experience and understanding of transnational feminism. Several of my interviewees, mostly university professors, activists and researchers in India, stated that

they believed that the term was strictly western academic, *and* methodological, something that reorganizes the ethics of fieldwork. They asked me to make no mistakes about the limitation of transnational feminism as a “national” academic feminist enterprise, the nation being United States.⁷ A majority of my interviewees feel that transnational feminism is even less connected to any notion of activism or alliance than those embraced by “international” or “global feminisms,” problematic as these terms might have been. The problems arise from these feminisms’ uncritical closeness and derivation from discourses of development studies, “add women and stir,” gender mainstreaming, narratives of “saving the other,” universalization and homogenization of the category of “women”— so on and so forth (Zinn and Dill 1996, Aneja 2005, Desai 2005, Mohanty 2003).

According to several of my interviewees, transnational feminist texts attempt to create artificial distinctions between various precursors of the idea, positing the current transnational avatar as more reflexive, critical and praxis-oriented. “When, in reality this is nothing but a mishmash of various theories of representation, agency and new symbolisms, necessitated by globalization.”⁸ Some respondents feel that transnational feminism might be yet another post Beijing feminist utopia. The aforementioned “artificial distinctions,” claims of novelty, praxis and transdisciplinarity mostly provide a

⁷ This sentiment of feminisms being aligned to nations have been expressed and analyzed by feminist authors. For example, see Ian Ang’s (1995) discussion of “feminism as a nation” which fosters inclusionary, assimilationist desires without ever fully giving up authority or upsetting hegemony.

⁸ Interview with R6, taken by author on June 24th, 2011, in Hyderabad.

boost to the field of academic feminism, still having to make a case for its existence decades after it was introduced.

However, the recent scholarship on transnational feminism suggests that this current, evolved framework ideally must not remain yet another theory or methodology that might become outdated after a while, and latches onto a participatory action research sort of model.⁹ Unlike, say, postcolonial or subaltern studies, transnational feminism keeps making tall claims of “praxis,” something that my interviewees find somewhat dishonest.¹⁰ In my interviews and conversations, skeptical references abound, including the image of feminist academics sitting around a table, drinking Brazilian coffee, wearing Indian or Egyptian cotton, and discussing this new challenge of transnational feminism, taking notes on their laptops manufactured in Taiwan. They ask each other, “Globalization and late capitalism are invading and distorting feminism, exploiting labor, gendering migration... what do we do?”¹¹

It is interesting that charges of non-activist cosmopolitanism in women’s studies by way of transnational feminism were brought by several of my interviewees who can be termed cosmopolitan-feminists. However, their role set has been one of academic-activism. In various phases of their lives they have been popular and academic feminist

⁹ This trend seems to be apparent in all the essays in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, and Richa Nagar’s *Playing with Fire*, discussions on transnational feminisms in the most recent NWSA conferences (2010, 2011) and close reading of thirty-eight syllabi of classes on transnational feminisms taught in the US in the last five years.

¹⁰ Postcolonial and subaltern studies, attempt, through historical research and literary/cultural criticism to understand the aftermath of colonialism and contemporary operation of neo-colonialisms. Subaltern studies have substantial overlaps with postcolonial studies, but originally, it was an attempt of South Asian scholars to break several hegemonies: namely those perpetuated by upper class, upper caste, first world etc. scholars and scholarships.

¹¹ Interview with R25, taken by author on June 13, 2011 in Calcutta.

writers, teachers within and outside classrooms and community organizers. Some of them are very visible in India, too. In our conversation I brought this up, to the chagrin of some. But these questions must be raised in order to understand the culture or dialectics of colonization, of discourses, movements and disciplines. The following passage from Bruce Robbins seemed particularly relevant to me as I spoke to feminist academics located in the global north as well as global south.

Beyond the adjectival sense of "belonging to all parts of the world; not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants," the word cosmopolitan immediately evokes the image of a privileged person: someone who can claim to be a "citizen of the world" by virtue of independent means, high-tech tastes, and globe-trotting mobility. The association of cosmopolitan globality with privilege is so deeply unattractive to us, I think, because deep down we tend to agree with the right that, especially when employed as academics, intellectuals are a "special interest" group representing nothing but themselves. Why else, I wonder, would we put ourselves through such extraordinarily ostentatious and unproductive self-torment over the issue of "representation," that is, the metropolitan right or privilege of "representing" non-metropolitan others? We have not thereby done anything to remedy the great historical injustices of colonialism and neo-colonialism. What we have done is helped to produce the great public relations disaster called "political correctness" (Robbins 1992, 171).

After more than two decades of work, transnational feminism remains, in many women's studies classrooms in India, yet another "American" framework that is partly postcolonial, partly anthropological. It is interesting to learn about as theory, but not important as praxis or even methodology. There is a sense of resisting or recreating it. Within U.S. academia, Transnational feminism remains a way of *studying*, transnational organizing against global capitalism, understanding issues of immigration (to the U.S.), political economies and women's histories around the world (as compared to the U.S.). In terms of methodology, there is nothing unique: one can do transnational feminism

historically, doing original archival research on ideas and processes cross nationally, on ideological, legislative, policy processes, and on histories of women's organizations and women's movements. One can also synthesize existing secondary work by bringing together works from and about various geo political spaces.¹²

My own work uses both these approaches, archival and ethnographic to understand the history of transnational feminism and its implications cross-nationally, the nations being India and the U.S., nations that remain in dialogue via expatriate, traveling, academic feminists and some activists. There is also another part of my research that locates transnational feminism as an epistemological formation and attempts to theorize about global and academic practices of knowledge-making through this trope, which claims activism in the name of academia. The goal of this chapter is to situate and map transnational feminist thought by historicizing the idea through critical review and close reading of the published and archival literature on the subject, by analyzing relevant interview data to assess phenomenologically transnational feminist "subject positions" and by tracing the evolution of this epistemic buzzword. The chapter also shows that the three "turns" in feminist theorizing--post structural, postmodern and postcolonial--are closely connected to the development of transnational feminism as a sub-field. These "turns" can be understood as epistemological breaks from various fallacies and gaps in understanding the past. Putting them in conversation with each other makes it easier to comprehend transnational feminism.

¹² Leila Rupp (2005) in *Transnational Feminism: A Range of Disciplinary Perspectives: Notes from Roundtable* at UCLA

Transnational feminism portrays itself as grounded more in practice than in theory—considered elitist and non-activist—right from its earliest articulations to the present. Grewal and Kaplan (1994, 2) — early proponents of this form and focus of transnational feminism— stated that,

We are interested in problematizing theory; more specifically, feminist theory. In many locations in the United States and Europe, theory often tends to be a homogenizing move by many First World women and men. That is, theory seems unable to deal with alterity at all or falls into a kind of relativism. Refusing either of those two moves, we would like to explore how we come to do feminist work across cultural divides. For we are committed to feminism and to seeing possibilities for political work within postmodern cultures that encompass, though very differently, contemporary global relations.

In the above passage, the editors of the seminal anthology titled *Scattered Hegemonies: Post Modernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* articulated their goals of promoting and preserving the transnational turn in feminism necessitated by the postmodern turn in the academy and in various national and transnational cultures. This postmodern turn, they argue, needs to be investigated, politicized and historicized, both in terms of causality and effects, an obvious effect being scattering of erstwhile monolithic hegemonies of Western colonization, capital, patriarchy and epistemology. They also note the transnational flows unleashed by pervasive globalization, the permeability of boundaries and creolization of cultures. They further state that, “Given contemporary global conditions, transnational feminist practices will emerge only through questioning the conditions of post modernity” (ibid, 28).

This emphasis on “practices” continues in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, where the editors state that “the point here is not to encourage a codification or

institutionalization of collaboration in the same ways that both intersectionality and the notion of transnational are being codified and disciplined” (Swarr & Nagar 2010, 18). The editors emphasize “radicalized practices” that would transform institutions and systems. In the earliest, as well as recent articulations of transnational feminism(s), normative statements abound: many are around and about “praxis.”

As someone who is interested in the transformative possibilities of transnational feminism, I argue that it is important to investigate and question the norms and assumptions of transnational feminist *praxis*, and derive some methods out of the *methodology*. One way of doing this is to look into the field and identify some ideal-types, or models of such radical praxis. The other way is to simply EMPLOY such radical praxis, which might constitute self-reflexive, constantly critical academic production: in classrooms, as an instructor or student, on the pages of academic publications such as dissertations, articles and presentations; in research, as a researcher or reader. Grappling with the question of bridging the academic-activist gap and considering whether this gap should necessarily be bridged and what it means to be an activist-academic, might be other aspects of such praxis.

Transnational feminist praxis might be collaborative, following the currently circulating ethos, but such collaborative enterprise must be open to scrutiny, *by parties other than the collaborators, especially the ones from the global north*. To achieve just and meaningful collaboration, one needs to also question who is collaborating and under what circumstances? Whether collaboration is pedagogical or exploratory (in terms of doing research)—the identity and positionality of collaborators need to be made

transparent so as to also make clear the often unequal relations of power and epistemological exchange. Assessment and accounts of collaboration form the bulk of contemporary transnational feminist literature, but it seems problematic that the authors, located almost always in the global north, while disclaiming authority, are still writing about their side of the story.

Scattered Hegemonies marked the beginning of recognition within mainstream U.S. academic feminism of a transnational feminist project. The editors stated: “This project stems from our work on theories of travel and the intersections of feminist, colonial and postcolonial discourses, modernism and postmodern hybridity” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 1). This work and others that followed signify, I argue, an epistemological break, possibly a conceptual vacuum created at spaces of critical engagement of feminisms of color with mainstream US feminisms that necessitated the notion of transnational feminism (Kaplan et al 1999, Shohat 2001, Mohanty 2003, Moghadam 2005, Feree & Tripp 2006, Sudbury 2009, Swarr & Nagar 2010). This break was also from problematic notions of “international” or “multicultural” or “global” feminisms that had, at various points in time gained currency within the field of academic feminism, efforts that some of my respondents called artificial.

These “breaks” in academic feminism are connected to three other “turns” that happened earlier in feminist theory, following or simultaneous with other fields of study: “the poststructural turn”, “the postmodern turn” and the “postcolonial turn.” All of these “turns” had implications for feminist scholarship, but I will begin with the postcolonial turn because in it lies the seed of transnational feminism, a “newer” “better” version of

multicultural, multiracial, international and global feminisms, in which subjects and knowledge-makers are intersectionally similarly positioned by their own admission. I cannot resist the temptation of paraphrasing Arif Dirlik's (1994, 328) "facetious" take on postcolonial studies: "When exactly does the post-colonial begin?" Dirlik asks. "When third world intellectuals have arrived in the first world academe."

Three Turns in Feminist Thought:

Constructing the Subject of Knowledge, Discourse and Politics

The connections between the postcolonial and transnational turns in feminist thought are not difficult to trace. Chandra Mohanty's 1988 article "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" is considered a key text in transnational and postcolonial feminisms. In this article Mohanty avers that any discussion of third world women/feminism must embrace two projects: one of dismantling hegemonic "western" feminism, the other of formulating autonomous feminist concerns and strategies that are geographically, historically and culturally grounded. This article is not about transnational feminism, it is about decolonizing western hegemonic academic feminism that constructs the image of the "Third World Woman" as a victim who needs to be saved, as a negative frame of reference within the discourse of development.

Twenty-three years later, in an era of the robust expansion of transnational feminism within the same U.S. academy that imposed naïve solidarity and homogeneity on all "women" and exoticized difference, Mohanty's article remains a foundational caveat, a slap on the wrist about what not to do. In the same year (1988) publication of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" marked a new milestone in

developing an understanding of the (post) colonial subject and subjectivity. She suggests that the subaltern cannot speak, her speech made impossible by the layers of hegemonic meaning imposed upon her, and in her later works she also suggests that the subaltern might speak and has spoken through postcolonial decipherment of their silences and in various ways that they break their own complicity in being muted (Spivak 1988, 1999). Spivak's works are crucial in understanding the location and implications of the "transnational," in terms of organization, exchange and representation of bodies that labor, and bodies of literature. She repeatedly cautions against that moment when speech-giving and consciousness-raising projects of recognition and identification, of third world women and others, become one with or indistinguishable from imperial subject-creation. Thus these two 1988 articles, not about transnational feminism but essential to them, could be considered conceptual litmus tests to see whether current transnationalization of feminist knowledge reproduces epistemological structures of imperialism.

"Postcolonial" suggests the formal end of colonial rule beginning in 1940s and a persistence of neo-colonial regimes: established by corporate capitalism, globalization, cultural imperialism, conditional humanitarianism and aid, military intervention and revivalist nationalisms. Globalization is an umbrella term covering political-economic and financial globalization as well as movement and exchange of bodies, ideas and epistemes. In presence of these many forms of dependencies and dominations the "post" in postcolonial has therefore been problematized by many scholars and scholarship. It has been argued that this conceptualization is linear and dually oppositional, seemingly signifying "clean breaks" between colonial and postcolonial (Hodge and Mishra 1991,

McClintock 1995, Spivak 1999, Frankenberg and Mani 2006). “*Post* means after in time. But what happened during that time—presumably in this instance a time between ‘colonialism’ or ‘coloniality’ and now? In what senses are now situated ‘after’ ‘coloniality’ in the sense of ‘coloniality’ being over and done with? What about ‘the colonial’ is over and for whom? This is not a rhetorical but a genuine question, for it seems to us that, in relation to colonialism, some things are over, others transformed, and still others are apparently unreconstructed (Frankenberg and Mani 2006, 294).”

Productively acknowledging this problem has allowed feminist theorists to move forward and understand the relationship between “feminist scholarship and colonial discourses,” issues of representation, subjecthood and subjectivity formation. Colonialism hegemonizes and homogenizes, feminist and other critical theories unpack and de-center the subject (of enquiry and of ideologies, the actor and the field), investigate the production of knowledge and other subjectivities. However, there is an understanding that certain kinds of feminisms inadvertently, well-meaningly or even consciously further the colonial project of othering, “speaking for,” or orientalizing (Said 1978, Spivak 1988, 1999, Mohanty 1988). Such feminism often becomes hegemonic and metropolitan, taking upon itself the task of distorting oppression as well as subjectivity. Such feminism has been labeled as “global” or “international” feminism that assume a universal model of western women’s liberation and an ahistorical, “cultural” homogenizing universal model of third world women’s oppression (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, Spivak 2006, Chowdhury 2009). The issue of “representation” both within academic and popular media and “development” within transnational (often “feminist” or

“women’s” NGO sector and corporate and other funding agencies) became problematic and came under postcolonial-feminist spotlight. Mohanty (2003, 42) declared:

...A comparison between Western feminist self-presentation and Western feminist re-presentation of women in the third world yields significant results. Universal images of "the third world woman" (the veiled woman, chaste virgin, etc.), images constructed from adding the "third world difference" to "sexual difference" are predicated upon (and hence obviously bring into sharper focus) assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives. Without the overdetermined discourse that creates the third world, there would be no (singular and privileged) first world. Without the "third world woman," the particular self-presentation of Western women mentioned above would be problematical. I am suggesting then that the one enables and sustains the other.

This problem of representation was not simply of the west representing or culturally “consuming” the east. There emerged issues of hybridity, and unintelligibility of coherent political, sexual and epistemological citizenships and subjectivities. Arbitrarily drawn borders, migrating bodies and peripheral/marginal positionalities brought to question the coherence of the subject of politics and knowledge. Hybridity and “borderlands” are notions and states of being that can subvert colonialisms and hegemonies, they can resituate and reconstitute identities, resistances and productive ambivalence (Anzaldúa 1987, Bhabha 1994). A theorization of in-between spaces and in-between identities forms an indispensable part of postcolonial and transnational feminisms. Identities are composite and shifting, situated and mobile, and therefore always contingent, always in crisis. De-colonizing/anti-colonial practices such as those claimed by transnational feminisms are always addressing this problem of

representing complex, fragmented, hybrid identities as coherent, monolithic and homogeneous.

The idea of a “woman” or a “third world woman” with its attendant commonality of concerns and constituency can be seen as a colonizing move that homogenizes for the sake of effective management of differences and administration of aid. Stuart Hall explains: “The inner expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms. If its silences are not resisted, they produce, in Fanon’s vivid phrase, ‘individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless—a race of angels.’ Nevertheless, this idea of otherness as an inner compulsion changes our conception of ‘cultural identity.’ In this perspective, cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture” (Hall 1990, 226). This notion of fluidity and hybridity and indeed diversity within various postcolonial positionalities draws heavily from post structuralism. The post structural and postmodern turns in feminist studies are closely related, deconstructive moments that resist meta- and universalizing narratives.

The poststructuralist turn signifies a move away from overarching structures of signification. Structuralism organizes the world in terms of symbols and systems: poststructuralism identifies and problematizes the very system of symbols that analyzes symbols, the language that analyzes linguistics as something continuous, occupying the same plane rather than being a distinct lens or prism. Poststructuralism embodies deconstruction and psychoanalysis: the radical politics of the 60s and 70s in various parts of the world. In the words of Terry Eagleton, “Post structuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and

catastrophe, which was 1968. Unable to break the structures of state power, post structuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language. Nobody, at least, was likely to beat you over the head for doing so. The student movement was flushed off the streets and driven underground into discourse” (Eagleton 1996, 123). The poststructuralist turn in feminism has led to an uncovering of the pre-existing symbolic order, investigating the structures of language games, understanding how power, practices and knowledge are inextricably intertwined that in a network of empowering and disempowering practices. The otherness, the impossibility of the knower to grasp reality fully and *know completely* has challenged scientific metanarratives, dominant definitions of “women” or “woman” and other truth claims that perpetuate gender asymmetry. The poststructuralist turn in feminism apart from challenging a conventional misogynist modernity and linear epistemology also asks an important question: “What happens when theorists are their own subjects?” The poststructuralist turn seemed to have deconstructed the category of women out of existence, bringing into question the centrality of the body, subjectivity and experience in feminist knowledge making (Alcoff 2006, Butler and Scott 1992, Canning 1994). Feminism and postmodernism are both deconstructive social criticisms aimed at the kind of monolithic modernity that, instead of generating agency and emancipatory politics, demanded allegiance. For feminists, this modernity was decidedly masculinist and misogynist because it failed to include and integrate *the woman* as a legitimate subject and creator of knowledge.

This marginalization and passivity of the feminine within every social institution, be it marriage or politics, education or economy generated multiple feminist sites of

protest and resistance, including feminist epistemology that privileges the ideals of justice and agency with the notions of unitary truth, goodness and beauty, central to discourses of modernity. Post modernism when operationalized as a political ideology joined hands with feminism, and in doing so: it exposed interlinkages between the language of science and the language of politics and ethics, it questioned the separation of science and narratives, it questioned one rule or paradigm of progress, it was suspicious of unification and homogeneity and it critiqued the euro-centric narrative of modernity and modernization. All these seem like near perfect criticisms of modernity. Yet, the dissolving of a unified subject and the transcendence of knowledge and reason cannot address lives all over the world that are being lived under various conditions of modernity. Feminists were therefore suspicious of the postmodernist project that may be disarming feminism in this moment of magnified, but diffuse matrix of domination that globalization crafts. Alarcon (1989) wonders whether the interface of feminism and post modernism free women from the service of violence against themselves, or do they only rationalize it well?

Feminists such as Judith Butler, Donna Haraway and Jane Flax have considered postmodernism as the essence of feminism. Flax warns against the feminist association with reason as an ally because this reason emerges from the enlightenment ideal that embraces universalism and reductionism. Like Lyotard, Flax (1990) identifies the Marxist theory as “modern” explanation of reality that reduces everything to the economic base. To identify any one structure as *the* structure of oppression, whether it is the economy, or religion or the institution of family and reproduction, is to universalize

experience. There must be, Flax maintains, a tolerance for ambivalence, ambiguity, plurivocity. For this reason feminism cannot claim to uncover the whole truth ever. Mind, self and knowledge are socially constituted; hence any knowledge including feminist knowledge may become power laden and dominant.

Just as knowledge is a regulative, domineering ideal, Butler argues, so is identity. Both Butler and Flax argue that gender identities assist the norm of heterosexuality. “The fixity of gender identification, its presumed cultural invariance, and its status as an interior and hidden cause may well serve the goals of feminist projects to establish a transhistorical commonality between us, but the ‘us’ who gets joined through such a narration is a construction built upon the denial of a decidedly more complex cultural identity-or non identity, as the case may be” (Butler 1990, 339).

The discourse of postmodernism intersects with transnational feminism to de-emphasize dominant identity-based studies and instead “open up” the field for identifying, exploring and theorizing about multiple identities, scattered hegemonies and unprecedented intersectionalities that a deepening global capitalism produces (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, Spivak 1999). Grewal and Kaplan (1994, 5) state in their germinal work on transnational feminism that, “our discussion of postmodernity does not seek to justify or defend a pure postmodern practice as utopian theoretical methodology. We argue that postmodernity is an immensely powerful and useful conception that gives us an opportunity to analyze the way that a culture of modernity is produced in diverse locations and how these cultural productions are circulated, distributed, received and even commodified.”

All three of these ‘turns,’ while speaking of the subject, of identities (such as “woman” or “diaspora”) employ, an “always-already” structure, that positions and constitutes subjectivity as always-already, pre-conceived, subjected, reigned in, understood and constructed (Said 1978, Spivak 1988, Derrida 1998, Alarcón 1994, Hall 2003). Used heavily in literary studies, “always already” points at the a-priori consciousness of imperialist projects which makes the subject and object of knowledge relative, this relativity and rationality reinforced by truths embedded in language and discourses. “No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self” (Spivak 1985, 253). This notion is important in transnational feminism as it claims to revive and reinsert subaltern testimony, critique coloniality and de-center the western feminist hegemony. In what ways is transnational feminism always-already constituted by the very structures it claims to dismantle? In my attempt to answer this question, I wish to suggest a simple, non-theoretical test of feminist and transnational feminist effectiveness.

Four “I”s as Test for Transnational Feminism

It is important to note that each of the three turns discussed above has manifested itself visibly in literature (literary studies, English studies, comparative literature, and composition) creating subfields before diffusing into feminist studies with their promise of nuanced revision and epistemic utopia. They have also suffused social sciences, and derivative fields of feminist/women’s/gender/sexuality study, in the process of the latter’s

transnationalization. These “turns” have connected feminist theory and research practice through the common threads of emancipatory epistemic considerations, social accountability and critical reflexivity. These “turns” have signified newer, better methodology for feminist studies. These turns have radically altered structural aspects of feminist epistemology and pedagogy, or what I call the four “I” s of feminist methodology: intersectionality, intersubjectivity, interdisciplinarity and intervention. These are four aspects that seem to embody and express what feminist activist and academic work tries to achieve.

The first, intersectionality, provides a framework to approach issues of “targeted discrimination”, “compound discrimination,” “structural dynamic discrimination,” and “structural subordination.” Intersection of race and gender is at the heart of critical race theory that explains the invisibility and discrimination suffered by women of historically oppressed races. Intersectionality is associated with being mindful of multiple axes of subordination and multidimensionally marginalized subjects. It is an invaluable feminist tool. Dill and Kohlman (2012, 157) contend that intersectionality is “intellectually transformative not only because it centers the experiences of people of color and locates its analysis within systems of ideological, political, and economic power as they are shaped by historical patterns of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ethnicity, and age, but also because it provides a platform for uniting different kinds of praxis in the pursuit of social justice: analysis, theorizing, education, advocacy and policy development.” Therefore feminist research methodology needs to incorporate intersectionality to claim “feminist” ontological or epistemological position.

The second “I,” intersubjectivity, connotes shared, collective consciousness and reason. Identities and interpersonal and intergroup communications are based on shared contexts, languages and systems. All subjectivity is also intersubjective because all selves are relative, social, constructed. It is central to theories of phenomenology that lay emphasis on shared experience. Feminism as a movement, theory, epistemology and ideology that explains, intervenes, identifies, recruits and mobilizes, is essentially intersubjective. That is not to say individual interventions are impossible. But to call something (an intervention or a theory) feminist is to recognize a history, an ongoing struggle, a corpus of texts and discourses. Intersubjectivity does not have to be about agreement or consensus; it is more about common references and symbols, irrespective of acceptance or rejection of or resistance to a system.

The third “I,” interdisciplinarity, refers to the practice of integrating disciplinary methods and perspectives to gain comprehensive knowledge of a field, case or process. To understand a complex social world characterized by fragmented insidious power relations, contested in between “liminal” spaces (such as between local and global, real and symbolic, modernity and post modernity, base and superstructure) and multiple, plural meaning-making practices, a commitment to interdisciplinarity is absolutely essential to avoid unitary conceptually myopic analyses afforded by single disciplinary lenses, and one “coherent” method of investigation. Allen & Kitch (1998, 278) state that:

In order to fulfill its intellectual mission, women's studies needs a discipline-transcendent command of the full array of knowledges that have shaped conventional understandings of women, gender, and sexuality in an international and cross-cultural frame. The desirability of interdisciplinary approaches to our field becomes obvious when we consider key problems arising within feminist theory and policy debates.

The critical issue of violence furnishes one indicative example. The recent United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing showed unanimous transnational and cross-cultural agreement that violence against women was an urgent international emergency, a major priority among delegates who could agree on little else. The knowledge about violence that has been derived from the disciplines, however, has been uneven, constrained by disciplinary tenets, methods, and pre-commitments. Most disciplines can only deal with certain aspects of violence and then only in particular ways.

Another example of interdisciplinary practice is the formation of knowledge on diasporic communities using methods and methodologies of history, critical geography, anthropology, sociology, and demography. “Gender studies” or “women’s studies” embody interdisciplinarity not by laying claim on a core corpus of discipline or theory but by allowing the disciplines to interact and integrate. “‘Studies’ is an integral part of interdisciplinary studies because it refers to a wide array of knowledge domains, work and educational programs that involves crossing disciplinary domains” (Repko 2008, 8). Interdisciplinarity is the essence of feminist methodology, as well as women’s/gender/feminist studies, a way to effectively research gendered lives, experiences, ideational categories, knowledge, relationships and inequalities.

The final “I,” intervention, suggests engagement in processes of social justice. Feminist discourse needs to be pragmatic. In addition to providing fuller, richer accounts of gendered experience and gendered outcomes, feminist methodology should embrace the cause of social justice and social transformation. Intervention is about staying true to feminisms that created the theory, conceptual framework, language and politics of emancipation and resistance. Whether intervention takes the form of action research (participatory or otherwise), evaluation research, policy research coupled with anti-

foundationalist anti-racist anti-sexist feminist jurisprudence and legal activism/conscientization –it must attempt to bridge the propositional-practical or activist-academic gap. Intervention can take the form of revealing and understanding subjects’ voices, experiences and narratives, it can be about phenomenology that interrogates modes of consciousness to make sense of social reality.

“Feminist research is committed to challenging power and oppression and producing research that is useful and contributes to social justice. It provides space for the exploration of broader questions of social justice because of the ways in which feminists have sought to address multiple forms of structural inequality. . . research is political work and knowledge building is aimed at empowerment, action and ultimately social transformation. Feminist research creates democratic spaces within the research process for cultivating solidarity and action” (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli 2007, 150.)

Examples of such intervention could be the women’s (not “feminist,” a paradoxical taboo in India, explained in detail later) self-sustaining research centers in India which not only carry out research projects on their terms, investigating the lives of women vis-à-vis the democratic state apparatus, social problems symptomatic of gender/class/caste oppression—but they also function as resource centers for scholars, activists and anyone in need of legal or other assistance. These research centers often participate in transnational anti-capitalist politics, building global solidarities and challenging dominant “western” paradigms. Another example of intervention can be researching historically excluded, unrecognized and anthropologized subjectivities and identities. Martinez (2000) suggests that re-centering the “Chicana lesbian” as site of

racial ambiguity is an act of intervention. She names her methodology as *mestizaje* praxis, which is aware of the conflicting codes of the borderlands, and she avers that activism and intellectual work are inseparable. Taking up the Chicana Feminist/Lesbian as subject matter of academic endeavor could be an act of resistance/activism. However, such acts of resistance can fail to overcome the problems of representation discussed earlier in the chapter.

What has changed in feminist debates, as well as “tensions and fault lines” within feminist methodologies are often related to the characteristics above, the “I’s of feminisms. At the heart of feminist methodology there always remained a desire to be interventionist. Yet, as women’s studies programs begin to inhabit legitimate, recognized academic spaces such as the university they are pulled in two contending directions. One: that of its transformative role to change academia for better and create knowledge that will improve women’s lives. Two: remain uncorrupted by institutional mandates of enrollment, revenue generation etc. The image that women’s studies always reacts to or critiques also stands in the way of its being recognized as a real field of study. It remains marginalized, politicized and misrecognized as intellectual endeavor (Allen & Kitch 1998).

The postmodern turn in feminism exposes a change AND a fault line. Postmodernism and poststructuralism have uncovered connections between the language of science and the language of politics and ethics, questioned the separation of science and narratives, questioned one rule or paradigm of progress and the homogeneity of the feminist subject (as have critical race and LGBTQ theories, accusing feminism of being

heterosexist, racist/post-racial and classist). Yet the resultant dissolving of a unified subject and the transcendence of knowledge and reason cannot address lives all over the world that are being lived under various conditions of modernity. Many feminists are therefore suspicious of the postmodernist project that may be disarming feminism at the time of a crucial battle (Fraser & Nicholson 1990).

To understand the connection between feminist methodology, feminist ontology and feminist epistemology and the role of feminist philosophers, it is important to reiterate that conceptual insurrection and production of new feminist theory occurred simultaneously within the process of organizing women's studies as a discipline within academe. Philosophy, sociology, history, and comparative literature are some of the sites where feminist/women's studies was being done originally. Women's Studies departments germinated from idealism and activism attempted to amalgamate theory and application, situating itself somewhere on the activism-academia continuum, taking the goal of 'achieving socially useful ends' further to initiate social changes (Howe 1977, 1979).

Thus the question of the fragmented, scattered subject of transnational feminism, the woman, or the women, or the gendered or sexed or the intersexed citizen remains very important, as transnational or postcolonial feminists keep inquiring whether the "third world woman" takes up any constituency in academic, critical of feminism, and whether, as Mohanty wonders, we can "assume that third world women's political struggles are necessarily feminist" (2003, 44). And as transnational feminism continues to expand as a subfield in U.S. academia, we wonder what struggles, in and of third world

spaces or otherwise, fall within the purviews of “transnational” feminism. Who is the subject of transnational feminism? What is the role of “national” in “transnational?” I continue to look for answers in the next section, which situates and maps the subfield and its ubiquitous concerns, flowing right from the round table in UCLA to women’s research centers in India, cutting across worlds and nations and civil societies and other uneven spaces of discourse.

Concluding Discussion: Two Necessary Catalysts of Transnational Feminism

Transnational feminism as a theory, methodology and epistemological formation crystallized from the three theoretical “turns” in social sciences and humanities in the United States academy, as discussed earlier. These turns are what can be understood as epistemological “breaks,” a concept from Gaston Bachelard used in the context of scientific development and epistemology applied by Althusser (2005) in *For Marx*. This rupture is a break in logical and ideological continuity of knowledge or theory, a paradigm shift. Postcolonial, poststructural and postmodern turns signify “breaks” in the way structure and agency, or subjects, subjection and subjectivity were understood by masculinist-modernity-germinated-epistemology. Transnational feminism does not represent an epistemological break, because it embodies, and is shaped by the aforementioned “turns.” Two related historical events or “lived experiences” have acted as catalysts to the development and spread of transnational feminism, and these are globalization and network society; and their resultant reorganization of planetary space and place.

Globalization alters production relations, political relations and gender relations across the globe and it has deepened and expanded both in terms of pace and scale in the last three decades or more. “For critically minded scholars, globalization encompasses an historical transformation in the interactions among market forces, political authority, and the lifeways embodied in society, as they encounter and join with local conditions” (Mittelman 2004, 220). This global process of transformation, of paradigm shift, of the reorganization of borders and boundaries has become the context and backdrop of women’s/feminist/gender studies. Globalization has become the subject matter as well as the organizing structure of feminisms and feminist studies, creating various subfields of specialization including transnational feminism.

Authors such as Chandra Mohanty and Nira Yuval-Davis have discussed the paradoxical gendered roles and relationships globalization produces for women in the face of the growing neo-liberal socio-economic order, nascent post-colonial culture and their dialectic that hinders as well as advances, restricts as well as transcends hitherto unexplored boundaries and opportunities for women. Mohanty (2003, 230), in revising “Under Western Eyes,” states,

While my earlier focus was on the distinction between “Western” and “Third World” feminist practices, and while I downplayed the commonalities between these two positions, my focus now is on what I have chosen to call an anticapitalist transnational feminist practice—and on the possibilities, indeed on the necessities, of crossnational feminist solidarity and organizing against capitalism. While “Under Western Eyes” was located in the context of the critique of Western humanism and Eurocentrism and of white, Western feminism, a similar essay written now would need to be located in the context of the critique of global capitalism (on antiglobalization), the naturalization of the values of capital, and

the unacknowledged power of cultural relativism in cross-cultural feminist scholarship and pedagogies.

Mohanty believes that the same global capitalism that colonizes and polarizes the world also provides opportunities for resistance movements. Many feminist scholars identify globalization as gendered, and as gender re-organization, through feminization of migration, re-centering of women and girls within the development debate and gendering of and activism on the new media (Gajjala 2004, Fraser 2007, Yuval-Davis 2009). Transnational feminism is both a response to, and product of globalization.

The new media makes possible globalization's compression of space and time. The emergence and development of a network society where individuals and groups with access to digital technology connect with each other through the World Wide Web, was introduced to the public in early nineties. The network society is a salient feature of globalization, the structures, institutions and rules of both processes set up in the nineties, making information and communication central to the economy and polity, especially in the global north (van Dijik 2006, Castells 2005).

Cyberspace allows the formation of virtual kinships for anti-capitalist and other forms of struggles, becomes "trenches of resistance" for labor movements, re-invigorates feminist pedagogy, resists gender hierarchy in the realm of technology and creates conditions for transnational feminisms. The Internet provides a space and context of feminist activism, advocacy and action research. Almost all feminist research studies that use the Internet as a research resource, methodology or field have

a manifest or latent element of advocacy (Gajjala 2004, Castells et al. 2006, Blair et al 2009). Acknowledging the unfortunate fact of the Internet enabling various forms of exploitation ranging from human trafficking to outsourced underemployment, it is important to understand the Internet for what it is, a tool or technology entrenched in prevalent social structures and gender relations. The role of the Internet in network society and globalization has been thoroughly examined and discussed in scholarship emerging from sociology, global studies, communication studies and science studies. However, the centrality of the Internet in any form of contemporary transnational feminism has received scant attention. I argue that in order for transnational feminisms to interface with, understand, transform and be transformed by globalization, it is important for feminists to grapple with the Internet as a technology and network society as an inevitable, ever expanding reality.

The Internet or new media provides the material conditions for transnational feminisms and what is known as a global civil society, or a transnational public sphere: a space unbounded by national boundaries but not national concerns. The idea of global re-organization of public sphere and civil society provides a rationale for “transnationalization” of feminisms. In order to assess the validity of the transnational public sphere, Nancy Fraser (2007) resurrects the idea of the public sphere, which in her argument represents the essence of democracy, a site that marshals public opinion for sovereign power. Together with normative legitimacy and political efficacy of communicative power, the public sphere establishes a critical political force. In the wake of post-cold war geo-political instabilities and the advent of globalization, she

sees the opportunity for problematizing public sphere again in order to make it politically indispensable. Spivak's (2000) critical exposition on the civil society also points at the understanding of civil society as a public sphere, often of hegemonic marginalization.

Since politics is largely dependent on the public space of socialized communication, the political process is transformed under the conditions of the culture of widespread virtuality. Political opinions, and political behavior, are formed in the space of communication. Not that whatever is said in this space determines what people think or do. In fact, the theory of the interactive audience, supported by research across cultures, has determined that receivers of messages process these messages in their own terms. Thus, we are not in an Orwellian universe, but in a world of diversified messages, recombining themselves in the electronic hypertext, and processed by minds with increasingly autonomous sources of information. However, the domination of the media space over people's minds works through a fundamental mechanism: presence/absence of a message in the media space. Everything or everyone that is absent from this space cannot reach the public mind, thus they become non-entities. This binary mode of media politics has extraordinary consequences for the political process and for social institutions. It also implies that presence in the media is essential for building political hegemony or counterhegemony— and not only during electoral campaigns” (Castells 2005, 14).

Network society is crucial to understanding the workings of feminist movements around the world, which often coalesce to form globally visible (and sometimes

effective) undertakings that can influence civil society. This civil society could be a composite space of transnational organizations such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) or World Health Organization (WHO), or simply cyber-feminist presence and virtual travel (real travels are expensive, time consuming and beyond the reach of many).

Even before we begin to critique transnational civil society, globalization and network society for their complicity with capitalism and imperialism, critiques all too present in transnational feminist discussions, we need to understand them, as structures that restrain and enable our own selves as scholars. We need to understand these processes as underlying material conditions for transnationality and transnational feminism and examine our complicity and self interest in them. Inserting oneself in the discourse in a manner of reflexivity is common in feminist writing, and while transnational feminism is no exception, it seems to be rife with selective insertions and problematic silences. One of the purposes of this work is to break these silences and understand how national and transnational structures inform and form in feminist discourses in extra-U.S. spaces. The logic of global circulation of discourses and knowledge products needs to be investigated in greater detail before making any transnational feminist claim of collaboration and mutuality.

Structures of global network societies are paradoxical, simultaneously enabling and disabling, empowering and disempowering. Feminist new media studies suggest that women in South Asia and the Middle East are using varied forms of communicative action on the Internet, trying to create awareness, garner support and

constituency through blogging, posting art and photographs, and creating and participating in forums. In India, transnational feminists consider expansion of access to digital media and technology integration as positive developments that help many women protect their physical integrity, creativity and economic rights.¹³ “Cellular phones gave women freedom to travel farther away from their homes for school or work than their female relatives a generation or half a generation before were able to. The cell phone became at once a mode of control that gives family members a chance to trace their daughters, yet a mechanism of freedom and safety for young women.”¹⁴ Whether such paternal protectionist patriarchal social control is desirable or “right” in the twenty-first century can continue to be subject of vigorous debates, in public, private and in-between spheres, the idea, as most of my respondents from India told me, is to “strategize before you theorize.”¹⁵ And strategizing includes knowledge of underlying structures and technologies of contemporary network, intertwined societies that co-create local and regional conditions of existence, conditions dictated by national and transnational mandates and currents.

Thus with these ideas, theories and “always already” structures of transnational feminism in mind (I hesitate a little to claim use of any unified theoretical framework guiding my work, using contemporary sociological and postcolonial theory only as blurry signposts in the dark) I proceed to understand forms of feminist epistemic

¹³ By this, I mean feminists that are intervening in the ways embraced by transnational feminist principles in the West, embracing the four ‘I’s, without claiming the “transnational” prefix or label. Mindful of the connections between local and global, nation and trans-nation.

¹⁴ Interview with R20, taken by author on July 18, 2011 in Calcutta.

¹⁵ Interview with respondent R10, taken by author on July 24, 2011, in New Delhi. Also R20, 2011.

agency in India and the US, to uncover and appreciate how feminists in and from these countries are involved, engaged and entangled with national and transnational feminisms.

Chapter 3

Comparative Epistemic Agency of Feminist Research in India and the U.S.

The aim of this chapter is to historicize and contextualize academic feminisms in and of two countries, place them tentatively in the institutional and epistemic structures that organize them, as well as study and compare the emergence and currency of transnational feminist articulations within these spaces and structures. This historical tracing and comparative analysis of present conditions will be useful in understanding the politics of transnational feminist “exchange” and desires. I explain also the production, life cycle and recycling of discourses and concepts that create and re-create canonical texts and how this distribution follows the logic of geo-epistemological arrangements. It is important to tie the notion of knowledge-making to space, hence my proposed adjective of “geo-epistemological,” something that captures the essence of the creation of political and economic space, and epistemology. I want to emphasize my justification of the separation of two geo-epistemological spaces: India and the United States. We cannot compare or comprehend divisions of power without acknowledging substantive divisions in situations and standpoints.

Women’s studies has always been ridden with internal as well as external contradictions and controversies, arising from various binaries it seems to embody, its proximity to or distance from feminist politics, its nature, organization, focus and boundaries. Scholars working within it in U.S. universities have discussed the problems of theoretical and methodological arbitrariness and incoherence (Brown 1997), hastened by poststructuralism and the postmodern turn that strip feminism of political subjects,

victims and heroines (Nussbaum 1999). Worries have been articulated about deepening institutionalization of women's studies that detract from its criticality and interdisciplinarity (Romero 2000) and reinforcement of western/first world hegemonic epistemic practices (Spivak 1987, Mohanty 1988, Grewal and Kaplan 1994). In my interviews with feminist academics in the U.S. and India the viewpoints on the essence of academic feminism represented a spectrum of distrust of institutionalization to hearty welcome and preparedness for it. The former end articulates the belief that the place of women's studies or gender studies or studies on women and gender rightfully belongs in the sphere of activism, a sphere that is best left outside the dictates of institutionalization and corporatization.

An extension of such activist and interventional presence is understood as effective undergraduate pedagogy, teaching college students to think critically and be socially conscious. Graduate programs on the other hand are often understood as subject to inevitable professionalization and "disciplining" (May 2005, Chowdhury 2009). The other end of the spectrum represents the belief that institutionalization does not merely mean being subjected to hegemonic institutional norms but becoming a part of an institution to revise and change such norms.¹⁶ Many academic feminist practitioners believe that graduate programs and professionalization actually serve women's studies political, transformative and interdisciplinary missions (Allen & Kitch 1998, Kitch 2003, May 2005). Wiegman (2005, 57), in her essay "The Possibility of Women's Studies" (speaking to Wendy Brown's "The Impossibility of Women's Studies", and other

¹⁶ Interview with R2 taken by author on June 11, 2011 in Calcutta. Interview with R24, taken by author on July 8, 2012 in Salt Lake City.

“apocalyptic narrations”) states: “...women’s studies can exceed its contemporary emplotment as the critical container of US feminism’s twentieth century political subjectivity. In the meantime it is the space of duration for academic feminism’s non-identical agency, which is to say the space from which the institutionalizing project in the university stands a chance to simultaneously outthink and outlive us all.”

I want to emphasize that the above contradictions and uncertainties in the field of feminist/women’s/gender studies are mostly articulated in the US context. That is not to suggest that they are not or cannot be relevant to women’s studies elsewhere. However, since I am comparing the U.S. and Indian history and current situation of feminist knowledge creation it is important to make a distinction. One of my interviewees, a self-proclaimed Indian feminist, who is an associate professor of women’s studies in a U.S. university, expressed her problem with my study by stating, “I tend to look at things very plurally and break dyads-so that was my only problem with your research proposal.” She felt that my use of “Indian” or “U.S.” feminism or women’s studies was an artificial binary, as is the act of locating knowledge creations within bordered spaces. And yet, I wonder, looking at the dissimilar ways women’s studies and feminist/gender research is organized within two distinct but dialoging bordered spaces (porous borders nonetheless due to current globalization) if a study of contrasting structures is not essential.

Studying and comparing structures does not necessarily mean that one is subscribing to the much maligned sociological structural-functional approach, or structure-agency binary, or “here and there,” “us and them” binaries. Not studying structures and different geo-epistemological contexts would mean losing sight of

contestations, co-optations and uncritical complicities within feminist knowledge creation. Not understanding regional epistemic structures and history of ideas represents to me a methodological flaw, as well as an intransigent post-structural reluctance to “ground” realities. This also represents a frustration often expressed in activist texts. I suggest that to understand the ways discourses on transnational feminisms are created and circulated, it is important to map how feminist studies are created and circulated in the first place, in what kind of spaces, where and when.

Based on interviews and review of current literature on transnational feminism, this assumption of “globalized,” fluid, traveling knowledge creation is one that repeats itself in the way many academic feminists located in the U.S. view the processes of transnational feminisms. Steeped in the strong desire to narrow or erase the distinctions between “us” and “them,” or “here” and “there” as continuing coloniality, the divisions of and between academic and intellectual labor as well as inertial circulation of knowledge, information and discourses between worlds and spaces of the global north and the global south are often glazed over. Transnational feminist writings continue to discuss feminist and anti-colonial, anti-statist, anti-capitalist interventions in Africa or Asia, without searching for articulations of transnational feminism elsewhere, a term that remains, for most of my interviewees who are feminist researchers in India, a distinctly U.S.-created construct. The presence of many women of color feminists within the sphere of transnational feminism, many of them academics in U.S. universities, complicates this “U.S.-centricism” but does not eradicate it. Based on our interviews and their authored texts, the women of color feminists feel that focusing on geographical distinctions is not

too crucial. On the other hand, many scholar-activists and academics working within universities and research organizations in India feel that there is a distinction between Indian and U.S. feminist discourses in their approaches, focus areas and impact. While they believe that fruitful exchanges and overlaps happen and should happen, they seem to be more mindful of the difference and distinction, both in the history of emergence, and current state of Indian and U.S. women's studies.

Whether in the U.S., or in India, the academic project of feminism will always be a field of constant self-critique, reflexive and reflective inquiry about its own epistemologies and methodologies recursively applied to test the claims made. Both foundational, and contemporary discourses suggest that, for both countries. Transnational feminism is a space of claims, reclamation and proclamation of feminist/women's politics. To understand the place of transnational feminism within academic feminism today, it is imperative that we look back at the ways in which the field itself was organized.

Academic Feminism in the U.S.: A Historical Trajectory

The purpose of this section is to recognize the themes, theories, politics and organization of the field as it transnationalizes rather than to provide a comprehensive, or even a brief history of academic feminism in the U.S. As expressed in Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy's anthology, *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, many U.S. feminist academics express hope and fear for women's studies' interface with globalization.

U.S. academic feminism, like academic feminisms in most countries, started with the process of self-examination, looking inward, looking around in the community, university, and looking within epistemology and history to understand local and national contexts of women's lives and gender equity. In the 1960s and 1970s, feminists associated with the "second wave" and various student movements demanded that sexual discrimination be eliminated from the academy and the workplace, from the "institution of sexual intercourse," and from law. While they engaged in mobilization and activism, many felt a need for systematized feminist knowledge, teaching and research. Strong but marginal feminist scholarship thrived in the departments of history and English literature, sociology and psychology. However their marginality and virtual invisibility could not allow for a nationwide feminist consciousness raising or consolidation of a corpus of feminist knowledge. To set the terms of the debates, it was imperative to evolve a feminist language, methodology and theoretical framework. This theoretical and methodological framework aimed at interdisciplinarity. "From the early 1970s, scholarly work exploring women's diverse situations and experiences has consistently confronted the limits of prevailing disciplinary criteria. Questions posed by feminist analysis have not been fully answered by any single discipline. Themes and problems have not neatly conformed to disciplinary parameters. Pervasive problems for feminist theory have demanded innovative investigation. Because disciplines have traditionally demarcated distinct scholarly parameters, many issues critical to feminist scholars fall to the margins or borderlands of any given discipline's preoccupations" (Allen and Kitch 1998, 277).

In the spring of 1969, a group of feminists led by Sheila Tobias organized a conference and a faculty seminar to “examine the portrayal of women in the social and behavioral sciences” at Cornell University (Chamberlain, 1988, 134). This seminar prepared the ground for establishing an interdisciplinary program in Female Studies. Around the same time at San Diego State University, the SDSU Senate approved a formal department of Women’s Studies. Within another two years, several new programs materialized at City University of New York, University of Washington, Portland State University, University of Hawaii, University of Massachusetts, University of Pennsylvania and San Francisco State University (Howe 1979). Between 1970 and 1975, approximately 150 new Women’s Studies programs were founded. “The 150 programs counted in 1975 had doubled by 1980, reached 450 at mid-decade, and exceeded 600 by the early 1990s...the expansion of Women’s Studies was fuelled by a pervasive need for a usable past and validation for change in the present” (Boxer 1998).

Earlier Women’s Studies courses were taught in small classes since the mid-1960s, in colleges and “free universities” in Seattle, New Orleans, Chicago and New York City (Howe 1977, 2000, Castro 1990). In the fall of 1970, San Diego State University established what is claimed as the first Women's Studies program. As an intellectual phenomenon, Women’s Studies also began off campus, in the consciousness raising groups of the Women’s movement, in Women’s centers, in research groups in organizations like the YWCA, in feminist parent/teacher groups in feminist child care centers and play groups.

The first courses on Women's Studies before the establishment of separate departments and programs in the United States were: "Images of Women in Literature" and "Women in Society" in English departments, "The History of Women in the U.S.," or "Women in the Workforce" in history departments, and "The Sociology of Sex roles" in sociology departments. These courses were very common in the early 70s. Within a couple of years, biology departments began to offer courses titled 'Biology of Women' and 'Bio-Chemistry of Women', and psychology programs offered 'Psychology of Sex Differences'. In Portland State University, the geography department offered a course titled: 'Women's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth' in 1977.¹⁷

As Women's Studies programs and departments began to be established, the courses became more interdisciplinary and integrated. Some examples offered in the Report of the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs are 'Women and Violence', 'Women, Class and Race' (San Francisco State University); 'Androgyny', 'Women in Myth and Ritual' (University of Minnesota).¹⁸

As early departments and programs came into being across United States, the goals were:

1. To raise the consciousness of students-and faculty alike about the need to study women, about their absence from texts and from the concerns of scholarship, about the subordinate status of women today as in the past.
2. To begin to compensate for the absence of women, or for the unsatisfactory manner in which they were present in some disciplines,

¹⁷For details, see Howe's (1977) report titled 'Curriculum and the Classroom' section of A Report of the National advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs (1977) Some of the first History Departments to offer Women's Studies Courses were UPenn, University of New Mexico and University of Minnesota. Some of the first English departments were in University of Kansas, University of Massachusetts/Amherst and San Francisco State University. The Sociology Departments were University of Pennsylvania, University of Washington and U of Kansas

¹⁸ ibid

through designing new courses in which to focus on women, thus to provide for women in colleges and universities the compensatory education they needed and deserved.

3. To build a body of research about women
4. With that body of research, to re-envision the lost culture and history of women.
5. Using all four goals, to change the education of women and men through changing what we have come to call the “mainstream” curriculum (Chamberlain, 1988).

Seven years later the first programs were established, and in 1977, a Report of the National Advisory Council on Women’s Educational Programs outlined the broad “strategies” that were apparent in the fifteen largest programs in the United States. These were more complex, more concrete and more in line with the situation of Women’s Studies within the formal structure of universities. However, the polemic and emancipatory elements were still apparent in the way radical and transformative pedagogy was strategized. These strategies were:

1. To transform disciplines (through a consideration of women), with regard to curriculum, research focus, and methodology.
2. To develop interdisciplinary curricula focused on women (or on the issues of sex and gender) along with a pedagogy that is suitable and a research methodology that is supportive.
3. To open additional career options for students through the development of coherent academic programs.
4. To affect the educational community off campus through efforts to change the pre-service and in-service education of teachers.

The differences in these two sets of goals and strategies in a span of seven years are subtle but important. A reading and comparison of similar sets of goals reveal a shift from “creative anarchy” to “organized professionalism.” The words “leaders” have been replaced by “teachers,” “women/sex” by “gender” and “correction” by “transformation.”

Women's Studies was still a political project, a proactive realm, but the early practitioners experimented with growth models that fit the interdiscipline within the established structure of the university, aligned it to the goals of the larger community, taking into account the entire gamut of gender relations that transcend women's issues or socio-biological conceptions of sex.

Women's Studies thus germinated from idealism and gender-focused activism, sought to pursue the goals of liberal education by incorporating interdisciplinarity and conceptual unity, teaching critical analysis, assuming a problem-solving stance, clarifying the issue of value judgment in education, and promoting socially useful ends. Additionally, Women's Studies also amalgamated theory and application, situating itself somewhere on the activism-academia continuum, taking the goal of "achieving socially useful ends" further to initiate social changes.

Variously known as Female Studies, Feminist Studies and Women's Studies, this new field included not just the advocacy for and inquiry about women/gender, it also represented a new methodology that is reflexive, historical, interdisciplinary and integrative. This methodology can be a part of not just Women's Studies but indeed any academic field of inquiry (Boxer 1982, Risman 2004). Another significant approach or theme the field tried to incorporate was a global or international outlook that would go beyond studying discourses on gender and women within the US. Such transnationalization was evident in women's history and feminist psychoanalysis and literary studies (Ryan and Wolkowitz 1979, Spivak 1987). The National Women's Studies Association (NWSA), established in 1977, states in Article II of its bylaws, that

“Women’s studies are comparative, global, intersectional, and interdisciplinary.” This inclusion or desire to include internationalism or globalism within women’s studies as an academic discipline has been critiqued as tokenism, Euro (or US)-centric hegemony and masked deployment of nationalist superiority in understanding the “other” or “testimonials” of the other (Moallem 2006, Chowdhury 2009 and Carr 1994). Mohanty (2003) in “revisiting” her seminal work on representation of the “third world woman,” suggests the “the feminist solidarity or comparative feminist studies model” as an almost ideal practice of teaching transnational feminism(s). Transnational feminism as a subfield or focus of interest is a direct result of “diversification” of the field, and of globalization that complicates global north-global south relations.

Currently, judging by the number of job postings, doctoral dissertations produced, publications, courses taught and women’s/feminist/gender studies conference themes in the last five years, transnationalism or internationalism, or a global perspective within women’s studies has embedded itself in women’s studies. On the other hand, several social justice/marginalization studies that have deep germinal ties with women’s studies, such as sexuality studies and LGBTQ studies are claiming conceptual and institutional independence from women’s studies, developing their nebulae of academic-intellectual existence (Whittle 2006, Halley 2006, Boyd 2005, Walters 1996, Seidman 1993). Thus fragmentation and transnationalization, continue to mark U.S. academic feminism.

In the absence of a centralized policy making body like the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India, the institutional future of women’s studies will probably be determined by structures of the home university, the publication marketplace and

decisions of funding agencies. The overall political climate—regional, national and global—also acts as an overarching factor in the workings of each of these structures.¹⁹ Women’s Studies continue to be precariously balanced between the debates of activism and academia, theory and praxis.

Academic Feminism in India: A Historical Trajectory

While “women’s studies” in various forms incorporating the “woman question” have existed corresponding to women’s movements in India before and after independence, the socio-political ferment of the 1970s was what created academic feminism in India, opening up spaces of research within and outside the university structure. The decade of the 1970s was period of political turmoil in India that encompassed almost every section of the society. This was the era of latently communal populist Congress rule. The legitimating crisis of this regime led by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi became intense enough for groups of citizens across the nation to question the state’s territorial authority. In the early 1970s, economic recession, unemployment and inflation set in, caused by two consecutive wars and rampant corruption. The state’s express promises to abolish poverty remained unfulfilled, which gave rise to discontent, agitation and anger all over India. This led to the beginning of new social movements within which the women’s movement also secured a voice and foothold. Many activist organizations, non-party political formations and self-employed women’s associations arose. In 1973 Mrinal Gore from the Socialist Party formed the United Women’s Anti-Price Rise Front, whose members were mainly from the Communist Party of India (Marxist). In Gujarat a similar organization called “*Nav Nirman*” was founded by middle class women in 1974. By

¹⁹ Interview with R4, taken by author on July 13, 2011, in Mumbai. Also, R6, 2011.

1975 women working in political parties and non-party political formations were also articulating gender-specific issues.

A significant event that influenced this leaning was the publication of the report of the Committee on the Status of Women (CSWI) set up by the state in 1974. This report entitled *Towards Equality* documented how asymmetric Indian women's situation was in the context of economic development and political participation, education and health. It spelled out that since 1911 the condition of Indian women had worsened, and that since independence in 1947 gender inequity and injustices had increased, as evidenced in the skewed sex ratio nationwide, women's short life expectancy, limited employment and educational opportunities, and early mortality. *Towards Equality* can be regarded as a foundational document for women's studies in India; it raised a lot of questions and issues that needed new theories and methodologies of studying gender. A lot of the pioneers of women's studies in India, namely Vina Mazumdar, Sakina Hasan, Urmila Haskar and Phulrenu Guha were part of the Committee on the Status of Women in India that drafted the report (Datta 2007).

The emergency between 1975 and 1977 suspended all civil and political rights. This drove many leftist women activists underground.²⁰ After the emergency was lifted, many city-based women's groups with a leftist orientation spread across the country. The issues taken up by these women's organizations were rape and dowry deaths. The

²⁰ This is referring to what is often named the "darkest chapter in the history of independent India—the jettisoning of democracy and the imposition of internal emergency (Alam 2004, 15)." This state of emergency lasted between 1975 and 1977, when the president under the advice of the ruling Congress Party suspended all civil rights and liberties, allowing the Prime Minister (Indira Gandhi) complete control. This state of authoritarianism saw uninhibited state violence against activists, academics and the press, banning of contending political parties and political literature, and a mandatory birth control program.

movement directed its demands for reform and justice to the state through campaigns and print media. The state finally responded to these campaigns: it set up commissions; included a chapter on women in the sixth draft of the five year plan; founded “cells” and “units” on/for women’s issues within ministries of social welfare, education and rural reconstruction; instituted a National Perspective Plan for Women; and even funded women’s studies within universities. This phase is widely known as the “new women’s movement,” characterized by new awareness, new forms of organizations and mobilization, and a shade of militancy (Sen 2000).

It is in this phase of the women’s movement that women’s studies made its first appearance, as a “problem field—that is to say, a field composed of issues and problems—rather than a discipline” (John 2008,15). This thrust on “problems and issues,” and a reluctance to be “disciplined” is also articulated in the first National Conference on Women’s Studies in 1981, which created the Indian Association of Women’s Studies in its aftermath. Madhuri Shah, a founding member of the first executive committee of IAWS and chairperson of UGC stated that:

We have to agree that Women’s Studies cannot be a discipline by itself. Its development will depend on the extent to which it acquires an intra-disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary thrust. Its future as a legitimate area of academic concern will also depend to a great extent, on its quality and its ability to shed new light and new perspectives on various areas of knowledge. In my opinion the ideal state would be reached when women’s concerns, perceptions and problems have been so internalised by different disciplines at different levels of the educational process that there will be no need for promoting women’s studies separately. It is true that such integration and internalisation, faces many risks of being neglected, overlooked and starved of resources, or of receiving only token recognition. There will be problems of managing the academic hierarchy, of overcoming the resistance of non-specialists, of getting adequate teaching time or other resources, of persuading students of significance in

the face of indifference of the senior faculty. The temptation, in the face of such odds, to introduce separate courses is overwhelming. But the history of independent courses on multidisciplinary problems in India provides ample lessons of their non availability in the Indian context. I hope the Conference will provide clear directions on this matter (Shah 1981, public address).

The publication of *Towards Equality* and the emergency and consequent suspension of mass democratic rights transformed women's movements and created an express need for women's studies. Research on women's and gender issues had until then taken place under the rubric of sociology and social anthropology. Some work on women's occupations and legal subjectivity/citizenship were being explored in legal studies and economics. But there was no systematic study and analysis that integrated, both methodologically and substantively, research on women's contemporary realities and history. Even CSWI, expressed the need for involvement of social scientists to research women's conditions across the country (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995).

In 1974, same year as the publication of *Towards Equality*, the first women's studies center was set up in SNDT women's university in Bombay (now Mumbai). In 1980, an autonomous research center—Centre for Women's Development Studies was set up in New Delhi. Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) was established in 1982. From its very inception, IAWS has been negotiating for gender equity in educational and social policies, partnering as well as contending with the state.

Women's studies in India currently are in a state of rapid spread and institutionalization. In the last five years, many new degree-granting programs, certificates, centers, schools and departments have emerged. While women's studies, women's writing, writing on women, gender research, feminist theory and feminist

epistemology are not new in India, they have usually operated in various unconventional settings, not always within the academy. Despite the long-standing presence of academic feminism in India, under various names and within various spaces, presently there is an unprecedented growth of academic feminism within conventional academia, in universities. Centers are becoming departments; erstwhile certificate granting units are becoming degree granting schools and women's studies is being established as a standalone academic program. With this rapid standardization and institutionalization, questions about the "political" and "activist" character of academic feminism within, or subsumed by the university are now becoming common in feminist discourses generated in India.²¹

Questions are also being raised about recognition of University Grants Commission's (UGC)— the centralized governmental body responsible for funding disbursement and quality control in higher education) increased recognition of women's studies as a "discipline" and as a "Capacity Development of Women Managers in Higher Education" (John 2008, 13). The importance of globalization and the need for women's studies and women's movements to globalize is being stressed by universities and the government, and this has raised eyebrows within feminist scholarship in India.²²

²¹ Interview with R21, taken by author on July 25, 2011, in New Delhi. Also, R4, 2011.

²² See Agnihotri and Mazumdar's 1995 article titled "Changing Terms of Political Discourse" for analysis on what globalization and "marketization" might mean for women's studies and women's movements in India.

Comparing and Contrasting Underlying and Overarching Conditions for Emergence of
Transnational Feminisms in Two Geo-Epistemological Spaces

From the above, it becomes clear that the context of systematic and systemic feminist knowledge creation differs in the two geo-epistemological spaces in question. These differences are well articulated by feminist scholars and researchers operating within Indian and U.S. academia and other spaces of research. Among the few researchers that have a thorough experiential idea of both contexts are scholars working in U.S. universities, who regularly visit and live in India to conduct research. While Indian researchers also travel “west” to attend conferences, give invited talks and become visiting professors, few that I talked to have actually conducted research on gender issues in and of the U.S. Some of them have been graduate students and fellows in universities in the United Kingdom and the U.S. They have experience of north-south and well as south-south research collaborations, where they are almost always in charge of the “Indian” side of things, the “experts” on Indian women and feminisms.²³ The question of collaboration is explored in detail in my next chapter. In this section I will analyze the structures and conditions of feminist knowledge production in India and the U.S. that emerge in twenty-five in-depth interviews I conducted which focused on researchers’ experience of feminist (and transnational feminist) knowledge production. This phenomenological inquiry of agents or actors implicated in the process of knowledge production points at the material and mental conditions of knowledge production and explains how the space or site of production of discourses such as on transnational feminisms are important. My interviews, unstructured but thematic, were designed to

²³ Interview with R23, taken by author on July 28, 2011, in Hyderabad. Also R4, 2011.

address this phenomenological inquiry through which I wanted to find out, keeping the partiality of such an approach in mind, realities as experienced rather than endlessly conceptualized and theorized within hegemonic spaces of publication and circulation.

My findings on the distinctions and contrasts between feminist knowledge-making in India and the US that influence the evolution of transnational feminism can be broadly discussed under three themes: centralized policymaking in women's studies; feminist research inside and outside the usual tripartite structure of academia, government and transnational NGO sector; and contrasting aims and effects of research. These themes can provide insights on varied modes of transnational feminisms, on different kinds of feminist research that incorporate the four "T"s of feminism— intersectionality, intersubjectivity, interdisciplinarity and intervention— explained in chapter one.

Effect of centralized policymaking on women's studies. In India, the UGC, which is a governmental agency ("an apex body of the government of India"), makes decisions about accreditation, standardization and funding in public higher education—universities that are government funded. Most of India's legitimate institutions of higher learning are public universities which have further classifications of central, regional and autonomous universities/institutes. Increased demand for higher education has spurred the growth of private and "foreign" universities, but most women's studies programs, schools, departments and centers are located within public institutions and are directly under the mandate of UGC. Studying archival materials (university and UGC directives, women's studies center plan documents reports and meeting minutes of IAWS) reveals that early

proponents and supporters of academic feminism who believed that universities must accommodate women's studies did so in negotiation with and "infiltration" of the UGC.

Right from the early days of women's studies in India, researchers of women's/gender issues have held responsible positions in the UGC and pushed the cause of establishing this interdiscipline. Respondent R2 explains,

There is a possibility for creativity, for wiggle room. The attitude of the university towards women's studies, intellectual background of the faculty, nature of their joint appointments, location of the university, everything goes into shaping the nature of feminist teaching and research. However, there are some standards that ought to be maintained, as mandated by the UGC. We have to provide various services within the university and to the community as 'nodal centers.' We have to act as archives and documentation centers, actively pursue funding opportunities and resource generation by setting up socially (and regionally) relevant projects, and publish working papers and reports. All of these mandates filtered by state and university policies become incredibly complicated and incongruent. For example there're approved research projects and hiring lines, but not sufficient resources. This mismatch of expectation and resources often disable the potential for quality research.²⁴

Thirteen out of my twenty-two respondents in India believed that the present and future of feminist/women's studies and its "transnationalization" will depend a lot on UGC's plans and guidelines. Some feel that the UGC is pushing a "global outlook" on women's studies centers and departments, with the expectation that research projects should tie into issues that are local and global at the same time. Examples include the effects of special export processing zones on women's lives and livelihoods or of globalization and agricultural imports on women workers in farms and agro-based industries. "UGC's mandates are vague, which is a plus, because they can be interpreted and re-created by us, (they) can fit our goals and operations," says R6, who has first-hand

²⁴ R2, 2011.

knowledge of both running a women's studies program and being a UGC appointee. Study of UGC documents reveals that the commission expects women's studies centers and departments within universities to engage in "teaching and training, research, extension; documentation, and publication, dissemination and transmission; advocacy; seminars & workshops; networking & coordinating with other agencies; monitoring & review (UGC no date)." Conversation with an UGC officials clarifies that "dissemination and transmission" pertains to knowledge of, by and about women; "other agencies" pertain to governmental and non-governmental organizations that are engaged in women's rights and gender justice work; "monitoring and review" pertains to self-monitoring and serving in committees that watch over others' work. The word "feminist" or "feminism" never forms a part of this conversation.

Publication expectations in India do not necessarily include books from university presses (which in India often do not publish books) or national and international publication houses, or peer reviewed articles in journals. These publications can be conference proceedings, monographs and training materials printed and distributed independently by the centers. Expectations from lecturers, readers and professors of women's studies, often holding joint/visiting appointments, do not quite follow the "publish or perish" model of the U.S. tenure systems, where "teachers of women's studies, like all academics, might find themselves caught in a cycle for which 'publish or perish' is rapidly becoming a frozen metaphor" (Broughton 1994, 114).

Teaching and service are valued, even in larger universities comparable to U.S. research universities. "This lack of constant domineering over our intellectual lives

allows us to produce community-oriented, accessible research that can and does transform to policy changes. I feel though, that this is going to change. Surveillance is another name for globalization, and aping the west is a curse of our postcolonial existence.”²⁵

On the issue of centralized planning and grants disbursement, respondent R15 feels that U.S. academic feminism is better off not having to interface with the government or a centralized planning body. “There’s endless red-tapism that interferes with intellectual activity, saps out all our energies in bargaining and negotiations. For U.S. academia, it is often a question of dealing just with university presidents and what is essentially a marketplace of competitive funding. This produces its own challenges certainly. However, processes of academic production are more transparent and research expectations vary from institution to institution. Over here, for purposes of standardization, there are similar expectations from faculty across a range of disciplines, without an eye for nuances and realities of academic production and distribution.”²⁶ This issue of interface between feminisms and academic feminism and the Indian state produced a constant process of negotiation that determines the nature and direction of the discipline seemed like a common understanding shared by Indian academics as a condition of knowledge production. However, many thought that this “commonality” or standardization can be useful.

Feminist research outside the usual spaces and structures. In India, a lot of feminist work and research on women takes place outside the usual tripartite of government, NGOs and

²⁵R6, 2011.

²⁶ Interview with R15, taken by author over the telephone on May 6, 2012, in Phoenix.

academia, which, based on the type of university, can be a governmental undertaking too. While this tripartite structure has historically served as the designated space of research on women's and gender issues, there are spaces outside that carry on autonomous issue-based research. In the last three decades however, as women's studies has found academic homes, a lot of the research in women's studies is taking place within autonomous research centers and government-sponsored research entities that are not fully under governmental stipulations. A women's studies scholar summed it up: "In the US, current feminist research or anything that loosely qualifies as such take place within universities, by academics. Here, we follow the 'French' model."²⁷

She is probably referring to the standalone research centers on women's studies, located outside, but connected by complex ties to government agencies, the NGO sector and universities. There is and has been research on women's issues done by committees and statutory bodies set up by the central and state governments, a pertinent example being CSWI and the National Commission for Women. Research is also carried out by local, regional, national and international NGOs, usually concentrating on local issues and problems; with an aim to provide solutions (usually short term, before moving on to another issue). Finally, there are women's studies centers, departments and schools that carry out research in academic feminism. It is important to understand that these research establishments are marked by complex interrelationships of accommodation and co-

²⁷ R2 heads a women's studies school in a prominent university. She is also a historian of international repute. Unsure of what the "French model" was, I asked her, to which I got a haughty response, for evidently committing the interviewer-error of interrupting a train of thought, "look it up yourself!" I tried later, and could not find any mention of this model anywhere. Of course, as someone who has never been to France, and does not know anyone personally there, this little cognitive slip illustrates the importance of travel.

operation, as well as by uneasy coalitions and conflict. There is also a clear hierarchy, where the governmental institutions command most visibility and resources, while the academic units and NGOs carry out research under mandates and guidelines produced by governmental bodies and agencies.

One researcher might, at various points over her lifetime, belong to two or three of these research institutions, sometimes simultaneously. I have studied some research centers in-depth that cannot be, or refuse to be, placed in the usual spaces of research on women. These centers interact and collaborate with, yet often stand in ideological separation from the state, the university (which can be argued to be sometimes be a part of the state) and the NGO sector. They label themselves as “women’s research centers,” “women’s research and documentation centers,” and/or “women’s advocacy centers.” These centers represent the least visible and most effective knowledge producers in and of women’s/feminist/gender/sexuality studies. This multi-site knowledge production and activism substantively bridges the activism-academia or theory-praxis gap, “something that U.S. academic feminism has been struggling with since its inception. Of course such ‘gaps’ have the potential to generate endless discourses and theories that, I suspect, make many careers and hasten the tenure process if not community involvement and advocacy.”²⁸

Contrasting aims and effects of research. “Right from its inception women’s studies in India has primarily been a research rather than a teaching endeavor. The founding documents of the first research units make this clear. Extensive research on women, women’s economic, social and familial status was what *Towards Equality* recommended.

²⁸R2, 2011.

“There was so much to be done suddenly; we had lost a lot of time.”²⁹ This understanding is reflected in another interviewee’s words, “Teaching and training must follow research. We must train *after* we understand what the lacks and problems are and whether they can be addressed by the state or the civil society. You cannot teach about domestic violence unless you understand everything, from jurisprudence to psychology, statistics to sociology of private and public spheres. Of course in the Indian context, unless you understand the interlocking effects of caste and class, you understand nothing.”³⁰

There are suggestions, both from western and non-western scholarship that feminism in India is an import from the west, and there are critiques and defense of these suggestions (Madhok 2010, John 2005, Agnew 1997, Narayan 1997). Various discussions on women’s studies’ field development in India point out a lack of unified theory and methodology and the dangers of “borrowed” or incongruent theory and methods from the west (Chitnis 2005, John 2005, Kunjakkan 2002, Mitra, 2011).³¹ Such trepidation notwithstanding, research was being conducted on women’s economic participation (agriculture, informal economies, professions and supporting labor), legal status, participation in pre-independence nationalist movements and gender violence in the early years of women’s studies (Datta 2007, John 2008). This thrust on research is evident in the creation of task forces initiated by IAWS, such as the *Economists interested in Women’s issues Group*. “This Group organized four workshops mainly to

²⁹ R4, 2011.

³⁰ Interview with R5, taken by author on June 20, 2011 in Pune.

³¹ It is difficult for me to place Kunjakkan in the same bracket as Mary John or Suma Chitnis. His work is logically flawed, misogynist and anti-feminist. Yet his arguments about “western influence of feminisms” are often similar to a more nuanced, anti-colonial, anti-hegemonic position.

have a constructive analysis of the traditional statistical system in order to remove its gender blind structure and methodology. The four workshops initiated discussion on ways in which women's contribution to the economy could be made visible by focusing discussion on women's work, women and poverty, the impact of technological changes on women's work participation and occupational diversification of women workers (IAWS 1981-1990).³²

The first official task force "identified research strategies and approaches on this theme and persuaded some funding agencies to support research on this theme. With support from the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), selected universities and scholars were commissioned to work on this theme. The result was a large number of doctoral theses and post-doctoral research on women in the nationalist movement. Twenty-five of such papers were presented under the sub-theme Women and Indian Nationalism at the Third National Conference of Women's Studies that was held in Chandigarh in 1986."³³

It is important to note that none of these theses and dissertations was being produced in departments or degree granting women's studies programs; there were none established until 2000. Women's studies was envisioned as a support program, an approach, a methodology of research as outreach, more of a critical perspective to be applied to prevalent disciplines than a discipline in its own right (John 2008, Pappu 2008, Desai 1986). "For us, research is always stripped down to its bare utilitarian purpose, to

³² This appears in an unpublished report of Indian Association of Women's Studies titled "A Note on IAWS Task Forces 1981-1990." Found in the IAWS Archives in Mumbai, accessed June 2011.

³³ Ibid

not just address issues but look for temporary and permanent solutions. To not just raise questions but try to research answers!”³⁴

In contrast, within the U.S. academia, women’s studies, which began as “counter culture courses” and strove to combine theory and praxis and integrating activism into teaching, had now to fit itself into the institutional sites of universities. However, even within that structure, women’s studies incorporated a post traditional character that looked beyond enrollments accumulated, degrees granted, books published, grants and prizes awarded to knowledge reconstituted and lives reinvented (Boxer 1998, Levin 2007). Initially, before the advent of graduate programs and hiring lines in women’s/gender/sexuality/feminist studies, which created spaces for bountiful research, the classroom had been the chief site of discourse formation in women’s studies. It was the site of challenging structural modalities within the university. “Circular arrangements of chairs, periodic small group discussions, use of first names for instructors as well as students, assignments that required journal keeping, ‘reflection papers,’ cooperative projects, and collective modes of teaching with student participation all sought to transfer to Women’s Studies the contemporary feminist criticism of authority and the validation of every women’s experience” (Boxer 1982, 667).

While universities and liberal arts colleges became the foundational sites for women’s studies in the U.S. academy, in India small research centers provided the ground for germination of women’s studies as an academic endeavor. While the contrast is not this simplistic, each stage of growth rife with politics—of the state, the market, the sphere of higher education and publication— it is a distinction that most of my

³⁴ Interview with R16 taken by author on July 13, 2011, in Mumbai.

interviewees believe to be salient in understanding how feminist knowledge and research are circulated worldwide, in what direction and when. Transnational feminism emerges as yet another new modality of feminist epistemological exchange that is creating new knowledge, perhaps reframing terms of feminist discussions; but it finally remains the recurrent methodology that perpetuates a global academic division of labor where the superiority of the global north is maintained. “Just addressing the problem of hierarchy does not solve it. However, it does make the addressor look critical and reflexive, which might or might not be her primary intention.”³⁵

From the above contrasting features, that place both Indian and U.S. feminist research in positions of relative, and alternating sets of advantages (and otherwise), it becomes clear that structural factors of knowledge-making dictate how feminist scholarship transnationalizes. In the following section, I provide a comparative account and analysis of transnational feminist discourse and methodology between India and the U.S.

Ways of Understanding and Incorporating the “Transnational” In Feminist Research and Teaching in Two Geo-Epistemological Spaces

In the U.S., transnational feminism signifies an emergent field within feminist intellectuality today, organically connected to current global economic, political, social and meaning-making processes. It is endorsed by transmigrant, anti-racist, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial feminist scholars, such as Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Manisha Desai, Richa Nagar, Minoo Moallem and Uma Narayan. So far it has none of the negative connotations attached to “international” feminism, or study/theory of global

³⁵ R4, 2011.

feminism(s). Current writings of transnational feminism in scholarship produced in the United States can be broadly classified into three categories. First, there are the reflexive accounts and feminist analyses of gender issues, including feminist activism outside the United States. These writings continue to do the work of international, global, multicultural and multiracial academic feminism that became salient to women's studies and the third wave feminist movements especially after the poststructural/postmodern turn. These writings use the term "transnational feminism" as a rhetorical device –to express a separation and difference from anthropologizing methods and homogenizing tendencies. Transnational feminist scholarship, thus, is set aside as different from earlier global/international feminist approaches to research. Second, there are discussions of methods, and methodologies of transnational feminism— ranging from the value of cross-national collaborations to the ethics of ethnographies that can capture the lives of women in globalized societies. Third, there are writings that combine both methodological and substantive works. Majority of these writings are by, about and on South Asian, scholars, sources and spaces.

Transnational feminism operates within the interdisciplinary academic matrices of ethnic, area, postcolonial, queer and women and gender studies communities, within U.S. academia as an area of specialization. It has some designated speakers who are positioned at the helm of affairs, constantly engaging with and rejuvenating the debates, such as Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty, Inderpal Grewal, and Richa Nagar. Many "key players" in the discourse formation and circulation are of South Asian and/or Indian origin, who are part of the elite North American professoriate, often transmigrating

between India and the United States, belonging to networks and communities (both activist and academic) of both the global south and north. According to some of my interviewees, for readers and creators of transnational feminist literature, the hybridity arising from being “here and there” is a privilege and a source of social/cultural capital that produces a specific kind of scholarship that privileges travel. Many felt similar to respondent R18: “I am unable to travel effortlessly, and my contributions in the mystical discursive formation of transnational feminism are likely to be ignored.”³⁶

Within Indian academic feminism, transnational feminism is yet to become a salient and relevant field, following the established canon and embodying the methodology already in place in the U.S. I am not suggesting that there’s a stable, hegemonic entrenched methodology, since a continuing spate of writings on transnational feminist methods and methodology reveals ongoing contestations and negotiations in the field. But there is a designated field, an oligopoly of ideas and producers, marked by the absence of academic feminist practitioners domiciled in India or elsewhere in the third world.

However, within academic and extra academic spaces of research in India, there are several ways of understanding transnational feminism. If I accept the tenets and canons of transnational feminism that arose in the U.S. in the last few decades, a lot of the near-invisible feminist work being undertaken in India is decidedly “transnational,” “collaborative” and contemporary. In India, the emphasis is on understanding the nature of globalization, which is simultaneously colonizing and freeing. “We need to, as feminists, as grassroots level workers, as scholars, as collaborators, prepare for it. Deal

³⁶ Interview with R18, taken by author on June 24th, 201, in Hyderabad.

with it as it washes over us, often catching us unawares. To us, understanding takes precedence over critique and preparation over postmodern vein splitting.” Preparation, for a society with rapidly changing paradigms does seem to be the leitmotif of transnational feminism in India. This preparation ranges from generating grounded scholarship on globalization to IT training of workers and activists.

Every women’s studies research center that I visited has, to date, created and collected materials on globalization, its forms and impacts— on women’s work and lives, gender relations, state responses and social policies. I gathered a wide array of scholarship in the form of occasional papers, monographs, pamphlets, fliers, bulletins and books that explain in lucid languages (including but not limited to English) issues ranging from the structural adjustment programs to new identity politics and bio-piracy to national and global citizenship. These materials are designed to be inclusive, so that they are equally intelligible to academics and grassroots level social workers. Lucidity of language and focus on damage control/problem solving has not rendered these writings theoretically or analytically unsophisticated. However, what most of them lack are deep discussions on theory and methodology. The *methods* of research and review, on the other hand, seem clear. There is a back-to-the-basics approach here, underscored by a sense of outreach and community activism.

Globalization as a source of problem and prospects is under continuous scrutiny. “We do not want to get stuck in complex language games, or critique and re-critique of social change. We do not have time for literary analysis. We have to inform everyone about what is going on by way of global production, distribution and exchange, by way

of unequal international and trade relations, by way of UN and World Bank and IMF interventions. We explain cultural imperialism and neo-colonialism by examples not precepts.”³⁷ Some of these hands on approaches to tackle globalization, that form the bulk of transnational feminist endeavor include emphasis on leadership building; undertaking cross-national, comparative research projects; and transnationalizing curricula. These approaches point at the social-science beginnings of women’s studies in India.

The focus on leadership building is a feminist way to reclaim formal structures of society, to play a part in decision-making that affects women’s lives. “We believe in women’s political, educational, labor and entrepreneurial leadership. Are we hell bent on shepherding people away from the revolution towards oppressive capitalist structures, as a visiting professor from the U.S. suggested? Maybe. But the revolution is late in coming. Meanwhile we need to solve problems of exclusion and marginalization of women and various other groups from mainstream public undertakings. While ‘add women and stir’ model has not fulfilled its promise, we cannot give up so soon.”³⁸ Many feminist organizations such as CREA, CWDS, *Jagori* and *Aalochana*, as well as women’s studies centers and departments within universities (in Hyderabad, Calcutta, Mumbai, Pune and Baroda) are emphasizing women’s leadership development, within homes and workplaces, electoral and grassroots political organizations. CREA, a transnational feminist organization located and registered in India and the US (New Delhi and New York), states that its objective is “To build the leadership capacities of women to add

³⁷ R10, 2011.

³⁸ Interview with respondent R17, taken by author on July 14, 2011 in Mumbai.

their voices to processes of social change.” Feminist leadership becomes very important in the current transnational climate of cross border politics, global constituency building and visibility formation.

...feminist approaches to and definitions of leadership were often indirect products of their struggles to examine their own relationship to and practice of power, to advance gender equality in positions of power in the public and private sector, and to create feminist structures that would not reproduce the patriarchal models that dominated most societies and cultures. There was a very vibrant search for theory and practice in alternative ways of using and applying power, new, non-hierarchical organizational forms, and thus, new ways of leading.³⁹

Leadership building, in spite of its utilitarian, corporatist and “western sounding” connotations, seems like an important move not just for feminists in India, but also feminists in the U.S. where women’s political and economic sector participation remains dismally low, especially in decision-making and leadership positions. Despite critiques of gender mainstreaming, and some of them quite pertinent, withdrawing from the mainstream is a privilege feminists of the global south cannot afford. Following mainstream, institutional cues for capacity development is a strategy for transnational feminism in India, a strategy misrepresented or under-researched in western academic feminism. Globally visible scholarship such as Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen’s *the Subsistence Perspective* is a case in point, where all victory/resistance narratives from the global south must follow a path of non-mainstream alternativeness.

³⁹ See Srilatha Baltiwala’s (2011) paper titled “Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud” commissioned for CREA

The second emphasis is on undertaking cross-national, comparative research projects. Unlike the heavy emphasis on “collaboration” by transnational feminists from the west, feminist research in India, operating under tight constraints, carried on by researchers juggling a role set of teachers, activists, writers, ethnographers and caretakers of family, emphasizes working with secondary data. There are many instances of transnational comparative research that produce studies on gender violence, sexualities, social exclusion, social policies and labor activism, to name some of the recent studies done at women’s research centers and units in Delhi University, Jadavpur University and University of Pune. The underlying logic of these projects is to compare problems and policies, enacted legislations and techniques of activism that have been successful. “Keeping in mind the different contexts and politics, our aim is to know more about what works and what doesn’t. We believe we can learn from each other even in instances when direct dialogue is not possible.”⁴⁰

“Transnationalizing” curricula involves the adaptation of canonical transnational feminist texts produced in the global north, as well as original transnational feminist scholarship generated in India. The US-based scholarship is classified as “third world feminism” on Indian academic feminist syllabi. “It is much like studying theory.... a question of being aware of what self-proclaimed non-orientalists, non-colonialists, non-universalists re-present us. We need to learn at what point and turn our country and our feminisms become transnational commodities,” said a women’s studies professor from an elite university. In India,

⁴⁰ R6, 2011.

the only universities that can afford women's studies degree programs and women's centers are elite, often old universities that receive substantial assistance from the government. For the documentation centers and archives, there seems to be an increased emphasis on materials and scholarship "from abroad." This internationalization is vastly aided by diffusion of electronic media and ICTs.

All of the above initiatives point at a vibrant presence of transnational feminist intervention in India, carried out without western feminist supervision, or gaze. Through this dissertation research project, my experience of being a student of gender studies in the U.S., and in conversation with researchers located in the United States, it has become clear that unless it is a seminal and relatively visible work on women's studies and/or women's movements in India, such as *The History of Doing or Feminism in India*—it is impossible to locate in the U.S., whether for purposes of buying or borrowing from a library. "It is all about the market for feminist studies, the logic of the market reflected in everything from Google books search engine optimization to who is willing to publish or distribute books from India that deal in feminist studies and feminist writing."⁴¹ Another respondent feels, "if the author is located in the U.S., works in U.S. academia, has tenure—that guarantees not just publication but a channel in the north to south knowledge pipeline."⁴²

There seems to be a shared understanding among feminist academics in India, that while there is a global market for women's issues in India when the women studied are victims as well as actors and activists, there is little to no interest in women's/feminist

⁴¹ Interview with R8, conducted by author over the telephone, on September 20, 2011, in Phoenix.

⁴² R4, 2011

epistemic agency, feminist analysis and theorization in India. Indian feminist actors remain-- especially after the upsurge of interest in transnational feminism- the “reported upon” and the “signified,” and their agency is always mediated and analyzed by scholars in western academia. That many of the “reporters” rightly claim “Indian” or third world or women of color identities does not alter this reality of knowledge making. Feminists and scholars on women’s/gender issues from India, whether as visiting or permanent researchers in the U.S. remain experts on India, icons in area and literary studies. Transnational feminism is their newest act of carving out a space for themselves in the at-risk field of women’s studies and humanities and social sciences within academia.

It is important to note that a lot of the above might sound like allegations and indignation, but being present face to face in those conversations, they sounded more like mere stating of facts. There is also an understanding that while skewed and filtered circulation of discourses creates a power imbalance, not every feminist research agency or agent strives for global recognition or circulation. There is an increased willingness on the part of publishers to promote and publish books in the “vernacular,” targeted towards a local and national readership. The politics of publication remains acute in a nation state of hundreds of official and unofficial languages, where English still compulsorily dominates academic publishing. Many smaller publishers want to intervene in that, publish books in non-English languages, promote translations in many languages and pay little to no attention to transnational circulation. “We are not interested to pander to the west, I mean really, the global publishing market can carry on its role in post-colonial colonization, I am meanwhile looking to publish unpublished works of feminists, their

poems, fiction, social commentaries, journals.”⁴³ Such publications have received a marginal boost after spread of women’s studies in Indian academia: anthology of unpublished works of activists and unsung authors in Bengali, Marathi, Assamese, Oriya, Tamil and a host of other Indian languages.

In tracing the politics of transnational feminist exchange, the structures of publishing and distribution must be taken into account and deeply interrogated. While that is not my project, and I suggest a multi-method research on that, one that will reveal the sheer numbers as well as experiences, my current research definitely points at a lack in transnational feminist analyses where there is a pointed silence about structures on knowledge making, buried somewhere in endless post structural analyses of language and symbolic order. New media is an interesting agent and site where a lot of conventional structures are reinforced, resisted and broken down. Google books might only show publications in and from, by and of the Global north first, if not only. But blogs, forums and other forms of publication are doing a job of worldwide circulation between those that can access new media, so there are ways to disrupt the one way flow. In the next section I take up the question of circulation of discourses and power gained from visibility of discourses.

Contrasting Politics of Presence and Global Circulation of Discourse

Fifteen years back, in a paper published in *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vijay Agnew discussed the contentious issue of how the “west” and western feminisms affect feminist research in India. Several papers such as this, written by not-so-visible scholars have grappled with the issue of transnational feminism in India, often without using that

⁴³ R25, 2011.

particular expression. Agnew's reading of feminism scholarship produced in India, about women's/gender issues coincides with what most interviewees told me. Using theoretical frameworks or research methodology from the "west" is something that researchers in India avoid, not consciously, or politically, but often because of the commonsensical reason that, they are *irrelevant*. Vijay Agnew (1997, 17) stated:

The absence of the West may be a political and ideological response to the hegemony of Western ideas. However, it may also be tied to the material conditions in which the researchers live. Books, particularly those published in the West, are prohibitively expensive for most, if not all, academics. Libraries and documentation centres have limited resources. The Research Centre for Women's Studies has an extensive collection of books on women but it emphasizes Indian subjects and local publications.

Today, however, fifteen years later, while women's studies libraries and research and documentation centers still operate with limited resources, access to scholarship is not a dire limitation. Due to proliferation of digital media, both at the personal and institutional level, it has become easier to access discourses produced globally. It is not impossible anymore, by virtue of institutional memberships in academic resources and databases such as JSTOR and Academic Search Premier, to read and refer to articles published in journals worldwide. This freedom of accessing and distributing content, while helping circulation and exchange of ideas, also serves as a mode of disciplining and hegemony. Ideas arising in the global north, such as "transnational feminism," quickly become the umbrella term, the signifier for various forms and projects of feminism worldwide, being undertaken and understood through paradigms unbeknownst to the west, by obscure actors and "unintelligible" turn of events.

For example, Spivak notes the impact of her own works on the subaltern. These obscure subalterns doing social justice work, have, as she suggests, permeability from the top, being confronted with ideas, products and norms from the west (Spivak 2005). What they do with these ideas, whether they use or fit into them consciously is a matter of empirical research. This one-way permeability means that their ideas, frameworks and methodology are not reaching the west, unless delivered and mediated by a native informant or anthropologist or transnational feminist ethnographer.

I use the word “unintelligible” to point out the problems of circulation, distribution and translation of knowledge. In “Can the Subaltern Speak,” Spivak puts her finger on the desire of the “West” to preserve the “subject of the West” or the “west as subject.” This is a scathing critique of representation and “speaking for,” and a deep inquiry into the nature of representability. The epistemology of various feminist interventions in India, the knowledge production via action, praxis, activism or movements remains unintelligible, untranslatable. This crisis of permeability relegates these “actors” forever into the realm of praxis, of grassroots activism, which becomes the content of western knowledge but never theory, never paradigms in their own right.

A closer look into the trends and workings of global publishing houses and digital mass communication can be reveal how discourses circulate and become canonized. To understand the domineering spread of any idea including transnational feminism, one needs to understand the conditions of ideological dominance and hegemony production. The publication industry is deeply influenced by prevailing institutional logic and global trajectories of power. “A shift from an editorial logic to market logic in higher education

publishing was marked by an increase in the size of the publishing organizations, public ownership and resource competition—all structural characteristics consistent with the increased importance of market forces in the industry. These structural changes in market condition attracted new and powerful actors with different goals and tactics that comparatively de-emphasized intrinsic editorial accomplishment and elevated financial pursuit” (Thornton and Ocasio 1999, 836). Women’s studies or transnational and other kinds of feminist published work are definitely not immune to the market logic of written discourse production. This lack of attention to what can be, and often is, a potentially unjust system of circulation of knowledge aligned to late corporate global capitalism might render a dishonest character to transnational feminist claims and canons, especially those that are created and published in the global north.

If someone were to undertake a project of computing something similar to Erdős numbers, for using celebrity scholars in the global north as starting points, then scholars in the global south would have very high numbers. If there were an imaginary “Mohanty” number, indexing of collaborative publications with Chandra Talpade Mohanty, or her collaborators, the number showing how many steps one needs to take to trace their work back to Mohanty, it is not difficult to imagine what those numbers will be for scholars of transnational feminism, scholars located in the global north (smaller numbers), scholars located in the global south (bigger numbers). These degrees of separation can mean various things: physical distance, access to scholarly resources and social capital, access to language and other systems of symbols and codes and to some extent, conscious political and academic stance that go into decision making about collaboration and

citation. Of course, Mohanty's writings have been amply circulated, and citation indexes provided by online scholarly databases such as google scholar provide a number that shows how many times she has been cited. For academic celebrities, that number is rather high.⁴⁴

These degrees of separation of discourse and the subjects of discourse, separation of the canonical and obscure, "non-west" and "west," are separations that get tangled in a spiral of silence, not talked about often. Discourses are diverse representations of social life. For instance, the lives of poor and disadvantaged people are represented through different discourses in the social practices of government, politics, medicine, and social science, as well as through different discourses within each of these practices corresponding to different positions of social actors. Not talking about politics of distances, separation and inequalities, between the researchers and the researched, between collaborators, between academics and activists seem to constitute a "style" of transnational feminist authors.

Circulation of discourses cannot be fully controlled by authors and creators of discourse. However, a close look at circulation trends displays how fields are constituted, power is dispersed and texts achieve infallible permanence, even as they are critiqued and

⁴⁴ An optimized search engine such as google scholar that can calculate the number of times an author or an article is referenced and cited in publications indicates a very high number for Chandra Mohanty (3777 times for "Under Western Eyes") and Gayatri Spivak (7285 times as of January 2013 for "Can the Subaltern Speak") as opposed to Neera Desai (cited two times as of January 2013 for "A Decade of Feminist Movement") or Gabrielle Dietrich (cited 14 times for Women's movement in India: Conceptual and religious reflections" as of January 2013). Each of these articles contains new, groundbreaking information: they are all published in 1988, and they are about women/gender/feminisms in India. Mohanty and Spivak went on to achieve visibility and celebrity globally, while Desai and Dietrich, feminist authors in India remain well-known and visible in India, yet to achieve the substantial citation index commanded by academic feminists located in the U.S. This is a quantitative example of the effect of geo-epistemology and logic of global circulation.

dissected. Moallem (2003) talks about the impossibility of decentered circulation whereby the model of west as the center and non-west as the periphery, can be upset. It is not always the issue of the “west” as the center, but other dominant groups also, such as the bourgeoisie, or petty bourgeoisie, or English language presses, or countries with legacy of English education. With the center-periphery logic being hard to transmute, it is easy to see how the self-repeating structure of discourses continue. The legacy of English as the dominant language effects discursive arrangements in all disciplines including women’s studies (Agnew 1997, Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995).

These self-repeating structures create regimes of truth, and discipline authors and academic producers everywhere into acknowledgement and submission. A feminist researcher located within academia and a research center explains this process of submission and intellectual marginalization as follows: “You feel this inferiority complex, because you are not a part of this, this complex of elite expressions. You do not know how to express yourself; your concerns save by partaking theirs. Their expressions make more sense, to the world, and pretty soon, to you. You change, adopt, learn. Be a part of the...elite complex. If you are not, they will make you.”⁴⁵

Therefore, this “elite complex,” akin to a panopticon, or what another respondent names, “a global jailhouse” can confine and discipline intellectual, cognitive expressions

⁴⁵ Interview with R22, taken by author on June 20, 2011, in Pune.

of reality.⁴⁶ Therefore, to cite, acknowledge and refer to the canons become imperative if one hopes to achieve a global voice. Of course, getting published or presenting at academic conferences is not a patent academic feminist dream in India. There is an understanding that intellectual works need to be equated with academic work. Experience of submitting scholarly work to feminist journals published in the west, even those that claim to welcome “activist voices,” have taught the folly of using “indigenous sources” to several of my academic feminist respondents. If their data does not conform to entrenched ideas about the “third world,” if their explanations and analyses do not cite “authorities” that they may or may not have read, they are admonished by blind reviewers and disciplined into submission, acknowledgement and citation.⁴⁷ “Those blind reviewers really seem blind, to every discourse except those that they are familiar with... in (their) circle. Of course, I am not saying there cannot be Indian academics in their pool, my topic being sex selective abortions in a South Indian village,” R19, my respondent-author, who received a revise and resubmit, is now inserting a review of literature in her paper, following suggestions by reviewers.

A great example of discursive hegemony is a marked increase in the use of the term “feminism” in academic-activist discourses in India. Resistance to Western feminism, or just “feminism” has been a trait of women’s movement/scholarship in India as they interface with nationalism, fundamentalism and political economy in varied ways (Chaudhury 2005, John 2008). Charges of westernization, and reckless feminism have

⁴⁶ Interview with R9, taken by author on July 25, 2011 in New Delhi. While talking about cultural imperialism and imposition of global uniformity R9 said: “That is what globalization does, makes a global jailhouse of the world where everyone must follow the corporate capitalist drill. What do you think?”

⁴⁷ Interview with R19, taken by author on June 16, 2011 in Calcutta.

been used against feminists and women's movement/rights/academic workers to devalue their struggles to raise awareness and change legislations to effect gender equity within the home and workplace, politics and policy. "Feminism," and its essential interventional, intersubjective and intersectional works are being done in India, and worldwide under various names. "Women's movement," "Change making (*samajik badal lana*)," "rebellion" (*kranti*), reform (*shodhan*), familiarity making (*parichiti*), women's leadership, legal activism, women's rights, gender justice, resistance to patriarchy—feminisms go by various terms and names in India. However, my examination of scholarship produced in the aforementioned fields India shows a marked rise in the use of the "term" feminism, not just in published women's studies, but in literature produced in women's research and activist organizations, in *Jagori* (New Delhi), *Akshara* and *Sparrow* (Mumbai) and *Nari Nirjatana Pratirodh Mancha* (Kolkata).

This shift can perhaps be explained by the rise and spread of women's studies, even though UGC never uses the term "feminism" in their official communiques. This shift can relate to the fact that feminists and women's rights workers do not want to give in to the religious fundamentalist/nationalist imaginary of a pan-Indian feminine tradition of subjugation and domesticity, compliance and sacrifice of the "ideal" woman. Disavowal of feminism also had to do with the activist-academic's own resistance to western cultural imperialism, a resistance not dictated by nationalist desires. "It is a striking aspect of our history though that the term "feminism" itself was rarely used in the early discussions about Women's Studies in India. This evasion with regard to the term gestures towards, among other things, an apprehension that overt invocation of feminism

and feminist concepts would entail a simplistic and hostile identification with the West, where the term is thought to have greater currency” (Pappu 2008, 2). The current rise in use of the term seems to be an act of transnational stake holding, of taking a term and making it one’s own, of de-colonizing the term, of intersubjectivity where a common, shared code is necessary to understand each other. Exchange and circulation of terms are inevitable, as long as the terms of such exchange tend toward justice and equity and as long as the “flow” of disciplining and gaze do not travel only in one direction.

Concluding Remarks:

Clash of Consciousness and Theory/Praxis of Transnational Feminism

The purpose of this chapter was to marshal the ways in which transnational feminism is done in two geo-epistemological spaces under investigation, India and the U.S., or more specifically, feminist knowledge-making spaces in India and the U.S. These spaces are contrasted by showing the effects of a centralized higher educational policymaking body, the UGC in India, and individual university policies, in case of the US, on women’s studies. Higher education being governmentally subsidized in India, there is and can be governmental interference on academic disciplines. A way to circumvent this domination is to recruit more feminists and gender-justice-concerned scholars in centralized educational policymaking. The model of numerous autonomous feminist research and documentation centers (archives) supplement the university’s role in expanding women’s/gender/sexuality/feminist studies. They are also responsible for an expanded use of the term “feminist” to indicate social and gender justice.

The U.S. university usually is more directly under the influence of market forces, as well as regional politics which affects its decisions to support and house women's studies. Mohanty (2003, 171) argues:

...political economy of higher education at the beginning of twenty first century is about seeing and making visible the shifts and mystifications of power at a time when global capitalism reigns supreme. I focus here on globalization as a process that combines a market ideology with a set of material practices drawn from the business world. In this context politics of difference, the production of knowledge about (and disciplining/colonizing of) difference, how we know what we know, and the consequences of our "knowing" on different realities and communities of people around the world is one of the ways we can trace the effects of globalization in the academy.

Transnational feminism is a direct result of evolving of the academy as a site of feminist struggle responding to globalization, recreating the everyday material/ideological conditions of intellectual and activist work (Mohanty 2003, Desai 2007). In the US context, most scholarship on transnational feminism remains academic, products of research happening within academia, often undertaken by expatriate, immigrant or transmigrant feminists. Travel to spaces of the global south and collaborating with non-U.S. feminists seems central to this type of transnational feminism. Because authorship and narration are almost always U.S. feminist prerogatives, accounts, voices and perspectives from the global south remain muted and mediated. The purpose of this dissertation research as well as this chapter has been to understand transnational feminist perspectives from the trans-nation, which in this case is India (U.S. being the "nation"). Inquiries like this reveal the differences and gaps in power and social capital, privilege and positionality that are often glazed over or

selectively disclosed. I argue that for purposes of reflexivity and academic honesty, endless accounts of self-reflexivity and citing the “other” as the “source” are not enough. Reflexivity is also about openly revealing “the other’s” position, uncomfortable as it might be. Just citing a name is not enough, acknowledging and narrating other models of knowledge-making, cognition and operations is important.

Due to the one way flow of western discourses no amount of true accounts, citations and narration of the other will help unless the others’ scholarship, perspectives and voice are heard and circulated in the west. This of course brings up uneasy questions of who can write in English in the spaces of the global south, who can and will translate “the vernacular,” and who can and does gain enough visibility to publish with global/western publishing set-ups (journals and presses). While capitalist imperatives dictate free academic circulation, and here the Internet helps a lot— questions of access notwithstanding— to democratize and decentralize discourses. I will take up the role of the Internet in transnational feminism in chapter 4.

I argue that transnational feminist ideals of reflexivity and inclusion, collaboration and mutuality cannot be realized if sites and spaces of global north and south are not compared and contrasted. This comparison reveals more than anything that these spaces are not place-bound, that worlds run into each other, that there is global south in the U.S. and global north in India, that class and education, theory and privilege, visibility and hegemony are deeply related. Transnational feminist perspectives cannot ignore the reshaped hegemony of nations even as the world globalizes at an unprecedented scale and pace, neither can it continue to selectively reveal the privilege of academic actors. Socio-

economic status, class and material conditions of knowledge must be taken into account, structures of power must be made clear before any transnational feminist ethnographies are presented for academic and other forms of consumption. The recent trend of claiming praxis in the name of canonizing methodological, theoretical and other academic production poses the risk of erasing and devaluing grassroots activism and “non-U.S.-academic” anticapitalist struggles.

Having discussed the structures of feminist knowledge production in India and the U.S., I will analyze the politics of transnational feminist collaboration in the next chapter. These structures determine praxis and epistemic agency despite feminist utopia and accidents of poststructuralism, and establish “geo-epistemological place” as an important category of analysis and comparison while investigating transnational feminist collaboration.

Chapter 4

Politics of Transnational Feminist Collaboration and Academic Division of Labor

. . . what it (transnational feminism) is enabling is new possibilities of collaboration. I feel like I'm seeing new forms collaboration between feminist scholars. It's an exciting time to be thinking and writing and researching about interconnecting these large, macro processes of global political economy to daily lived reality. And we're in a really exciting time politically where social movements are already doing this work if we can keep up with them. [Applause]

-Maylei Blackwell⁴⁸

Cross-border collaboration has emerged as central to the discourse on transnational feminism (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, Nagar 2002, Mohanty 2003, Swarr and Nagar 2010). Fifty percent of my interviewees and sixty percent of respondents who identify as feminist scholars, in a survey on transnational feminism that was created as a part of this dissertation research, believed that any transnational mode of feminist knowledge creation essentially incorporates cross-national feminist collaboration, or collaboration between feminists and feminist projects of various countries, whether in terms of research, or activism, or both. Collaboration has also emerged as a methodological imperative in many women's/feminist/gender studies dissertations produced in the US in the last ten years, especially dissertations that also claim a transnational feminist approach or study international or cross-national processes, events and discourses. Collaboration, coalitions and "uneasy alliances" characterize not just academic feminisms, but also other forms of transnational feminisms, e.g. union feminism, NGO/non-profit feminisms and international women's movements embracing

⁴⁸ Notes from roundtable in UCLA titled "Transnational Feminism: A Range of Disciplinary Perspectives", held on May 18, 2005.

politics of engagement (Moghadam 2000, Desai 2002, Franzway & Fonow 2011, Chowdhury 2011).

In this chapter I continue to investigate the politics of engagement and collaboration as a central claim made in transnational feminist scholarship, a claim that often overrides “other” claims of recurrent powerlessness of collaborators located in the global south, their perceived and articulated unease in the way they are positioned within such partnerships. These silent collaborators—not often being the authors who write up accounts of such collaborations, or exercising authority over transnational feminist discourses— remain unable to express their concerns about their roles, silences and marginalization in the process of collaborative knowledge creation.

Collaboration and alliance building have become embedded in transnational feminism, ever since Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan brought the terms “transnational” and “feminist” together for the first time. “In calling for transnational alliances, our purpose is to acknowledge the different forms that feminisms take and the different practices that can be seen as feminist movements” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 20). I use the authors’ introductory discussion as a guideline to evaluate the cross-national collaboration that takes place within this project and others. Does the process of collaborative research and writing address issues of latent and manifest power, transnational/global political, economic and cultural processes, positionality of the collaborators and material conditions of collaboration? Does it situate the “nation” as site of and in interface with transnational, scattered hegemonies? These questions, by the

authors' own justifications seem to be vital to transnational feminist consciousness.

Therefore they should be important to transnational feminist collaborative epistemology.

To search for material, actual instances of collaboration and what they imply I have talked to researchers in both India and the U.S.; studied publications and unpublished reports, doctoral dissertations and other forms of texts that came out of research collaborations, as what is often known in the paid research realm as “deliverables.” These deliverables circulate, creating hegemony of collaborative research where inherent injustices remain buried in a web of material and symbolic self-interests.

I have traced the trajectory of collaboration as a defining process in transnational feminism through attempting a genealogy of this idea in the subfield of transnational feminism and feminist epistemology. I have traced this genealogy through critical discourse analysis, consciously freeing myself from weighing the comparative advantages of structuralist vs. post structuralist analyses, which might have lead me to a theoretical dead-end. I instead argue, not just in this chapter but in my entire dissertation, that it is important to consider the organization of knowledge production and collaboration, in this case collaborative knowledge production, by studying its “real” (material) and “symbolic” structures. These structures range from language to markets, rules of research as designated by IRBs to expectations and resources of research and scholarship configured by institutions. It is equally important to understand epistemic agency: who creates knowledge, which scholars wield authority and have visibility, what circulates and is read, and modes of sharing and negotiating power that remain latent in knowledge enterprises. The arguments and observations made here about collaborative

knowledge in the field of transnational feminisms are applicable to and testable in most, if not all realms of academic knowledge production.

In order to understand the conditions, events and experiences of collaboration it is important to trace its theoretical genealogy and compare that to a phenomenology (gathered from experiential accounts) of collaboration. A theoretical discussion will help to ground my research on collaboration between academics and non-academics, activists and non-activists, entities belonging to global south and north. This chapter is all about creating a phenomenology of collaboration based on interview data and other textual accounts, in an attempt at grounding theory and seeking theoretical frameworks in the experiential accounts themselves.

I argue too, that theoretical claims made in spaces and texts produced and circulated in the western academy are often incongruent and/or inconsistent with experiences and knowledge in the “fields” or “sites” or “subjects” of the global south. I also argue that theories and accounts of transnational feminist collaboration often fail to talk about the material conditions of knowledge production and circulation, focusing instead on the “politics” of collaboration narrowly between the parties, and not on the global processes of exchange, mobility and displacement that determine such projects. There is little focus, for instance on the laws governing research funding or the economics of publication. And while the researchers from the global north reflexively position and insert themselves within the narratives and discourses, their performance of candor and reflexivity preclude discussions of their own privilege and motivations for engaging in cross border research projects beyond the feminist and/or activist drive.

There is a recent trend in bridging conceptual and situational gaps between “academic” and “activist” intervention, between theory and action, or knowledge and experience, by means of alluring rhetorical constructions that leave the realities of the nation and transnational negotiations untouched. In this chapter I am attempting to unravel the various spirals of silence innate in transnational feminist discourses on collaboration as well by analyzing the manifest and latent politics of cross border collaboration. As with the rest of the dissertation, I am looking at the exchange between north-south collaborators, the U.S. representing the seat and context of the global north, and India, global south. The scholars of Indian origin located and productive in the U.S. returning to India in search of new or continuing collaborations complicate the north-south binary, but I argue nonetheless, based on my own and my respondents’ understanding of transnational processes, that assumption of such a division is necessary. At the cost of imagined indignation on the part of U.S. academics who claim an Indian identity or belonging in some form or other, I will still be situating them in the global north based on their length of expatriation and work history among other, often self-articulated, self-reported experiences.

Tracing the Genealogy of Transnational Feminist Collaboration

In *Playing with Fire*, Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar (2006, 154) state: “Theory of collaboration is generated as praxis; that is, what matters in this intellectual and political journey is not just theory-as-product but also the activity of knowledge production, especially as a site for negotiating difference and power.” Theory and/or praxis of collaboration appear as empty signifiers in many transnational feminist texts. In other

words, theory and praxis related to collaboration are recognized, but only in passing. They are collapsed and conjugated, without fleshing out what they are or might be. In this section I look for theories of collaboration and situation of collaboration in transnational feminist discourses. It is important to note that collaboration has been deemed to be central to not just transnational feminist knowledge generation but to all feminist epistemology. We need to have not just a methodology of collaboration but also several methods that fit disparate research situations. Through notions of epistemological community (Nelson, 1993); epistemic micro and macro-negotiations (Potter 1993); communal epistemic privilege and democratic science (Longino 1993); rationality as a communal practice (Tanesini 1999)—feminist epistemologists have revealed communal, collaborative, collective and non-individualistic process of knowledge creation. Transnational feminist discourse draws from them.

Collaboration or community does not have to necessarily connote consensus, especially consensus which is the result of majoritarian political or economic power and exclusion of dissenting perspectives; rather, making the epistemic community visible is a way of also revealing the plurality and partiality of knowledge (Longino 1993, Haraway 1988). In discussions on feminist methodologies, collaborative action research has been positioned as a way to challenge hegemony (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli 2012, Mendez & Wolf 2012, Lather and Smithies 1997). Bernice Johnson Reagon, feminist civil rights activist, wrote about coalition building; her words have been used by transnational feminists to explain the “uneasy” nature of cross national collaboration and alliances, as opposed to “universal sisterhood” and simplified solidarity (Grewal 1994, Mohanty

2003). Reagan's legendary words were: "You don't go into coalition because you just like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you is because that's the only way you can figure you can stay alive" (1983, 343). Within cross national research and knowledge-making collaborations, the conflicts that arise are not usually fatal, but they definitely indicate serious power imbalances. My interview data reveal that the accounts of these conflicts in transnational feminist scholarship are selective if not silenced.

Collaboration has been recommended and embraced by Grewal and Kaplan in their foundational text *Scattered Hegemonies* where they state: "We believe that we must work collaboratively in order to formulate transnational feminist alliances. This book does not result from our own collaborative planning, writing, and editing (conducted over 3,000 miles of phone, fax, and postal lines of communication) alone. The ideas and methods found in this volume can also be seen as the work of those who welcomed our proposal and formed a writing community with us" (1994, 1). The mileage of collaboration has increased to cross many borders of nations and academic conventions in Swarr and Nagar's *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, a recent anthology on transnational feminism. The editors of this volume aver that, "...all academic production is necessarily collaborative, notwithstanding the individualized manner in which authorship is claimed and assigned and celebrity granted to academics and isolated knowledge producers. Undergraduate classrooms, graduate seminars, workshops, conferences, academic peer reviews, and fieldwork based knowledge production are all examples of the everyday collaborative spaces and tools through which academics create

knowledges and learn to speak to various communities inside and outside of academia” (2010, 1).

I start with those two anthologies because they represent two notable moments of transnational feminist scholarship, and are similar in their publication structure (they are anthologies published by university presses). I subject these volumes to critical discourse analysis repeatedly in my work because they are canonical, claims-laden, seminal texts taught in almost all transnational feminist theory classrooms in the U.S. and in India. In both of these texts transnational feminisms are analyzed and editorialized to be academic (and extra-academic) feminist responses to challenges of globalization, modernity and post modernity. Grewal and Kaplan’s book inserts transnational feminism, both as a term and transition in academic feminist discourse, and serves to “work as a springboard to launch other transnational, feminist and collaborative projects.” Swarr and Nagar’s (2010, 2) is an attempt, by their own articulation and through my analysis, to be “an initial step in what we see as our long-term collaborative journey with one another and with collaborators in other academic and nonacademic locations”

In these and other articulations of transnational feminist collaboration, I see a silence on academic work as not just scholarly, but also as a production or resource that follows the logic of the marketplace. Apart from embodying feminist activist-academic conversations and alliances, collaborative work also embodies questions of academic relevance, often dictated by trends set by corporate-nationalist forces within the university, funding agencies and popular public opinion. Production of books and articles on collaborative transnational feminist, or indeed any work, has to go through processes

of negotiation—in partnering, funding, review, editing and other processes of “preparation.” Cross national collaboration is subject to varying legal-national arrangements of funding disbursement, immigration, research protocol and educational/university policies. The final product almost always serves purposes beyond contributing to discourses and movements. It also contributes to promotion and tenure and other career goals and evidence of scholarly progress, not just of persons but of an entire field. Acknowledgement or discussion of these processes of production is necessary to understand and un-silence the politics of transnational collaborative knowledge-making.

Research collaboration and collaborative writing practices have evolved as radically coalitional, collective epistemic praxis that acknowledges and annihilates symbolic violence of systematic, colonial knowledge that served to manage and oppress subjects of knowledge. Coalition is understood as central to a methodology of the oppressed, a methodology that embodies oppositional consciousness and differential social movement (Sandoval 2000). Such coalitions sustain, not without conflicts and contradictions, various social justice movements and feminisms. Such coalitions are essential to achieve cross border feminist solidarity (Mohanty 2003). However, what happens when such coalitions are actually applied to knowledge production? Here, I take as evidence published scholarship that is under the collaborative and coalitional rubric of transnational feminism and situating it as non-hegemonic feminism. Through close reading of such scholarship published and circulated in U.S. and Indian academia I will delineate some recurrent themes or underlying issues of transnational feminist

collaboration. These themes, or patterns gleaned from transnational feminist texts on “collaboration” as a research methodology, coincide with what my interviewees in India have observed in their participation in collaborative research projects. However, there are other patterns that remain tangled in the spiral of silence, never fully articulated or made visible.

Grewal and Kaplan’s *Scattered Hegemonies* argued for a different kind of feminism as well as a different form of postmodernity. This book was a testimony to making possible such a feminism based on transnational alliances that produce a collaborative project of interrogating the scattered hegemonies of globalization, nationalisms and fundamentalisms. The author-editors identify processes born of deepening western colonial modernity that have become fragmented or scattered as transnational flows and formations rearrange populations and cultures. They argue for a revision of the notion of postmodernity that recognizes the diversity and multiplicity of feminist contexts, situations, movements and language around the world. This anthology is their attempt to realize and re-energize such postmodern, transnational feminist project based on resistance-alliances and cross national collaboration.

Scattered Hegemonies is a text on transnational feminisms, but it is also firmly located within the tradition of postcolonial literary theory. Its audience remains the knowledge producers located within academic spaces of the global north, looking for alternative paradigms, subversive historiography. Theories of cultural production and reception are enmeshed with and overdetermined by notions of “nation” and critique of nationalism. The categories of “women” and “woman” are examined, in true postmodern

fashion, as sites of conflict and conquests, nation formation and the reproduction of “national cultures.” Novels and narratives are analyzed by the authors to understand the connections of female body and nationalist discourse in China or spectacle of motherhood and nationhood in India, or between Greece and Turkey. These arguments about women in nations and women as nations are constructed based on close reading of fiction and creation of a dramaturgical account of experimental, almost impossible feminist ethnography. Each of the essays in *Scattered Hegemonies* presents a deconstructive discussion of epistemic power and nation, and how they constitute each other.

The collaboration signified in this volume is the collaboration between “lesser known,” “junior faculty,” operating within postmodern and transnational intersubjectivity. This is not collaborative ethnography and the job of cross national analysis is undertaken partially by the editors; the rest is left to academic readers to contemplate. The transnational feminist practices thus remain plurivocal, open to multiple interpretations, critiquing the critique, locked in the mating game of academic reproduction of the “other”, in a postmodern, non-hegemonic fashion. Transnational feminism emerges as a postmodern site of social and literary criticism, a site of cross national commonalities as well as specificities of discourse on women and nation. “Feminist Practices” thus do not leave theoretical and metatheoretical realms ripe and rife with postmodern promise.

What is this promise? What is the kind of knowledge being created in the dawn of transnational feminism? What is the nature of collaboration being exemplified? To borrow Terry Eagleton's (2008, 201) words:

There is no overarching totality, rationality or fixed centre to human life, no meta-language which can capture its endless variety, just a plurality of cultures and narratives which cannot be hierarchically ordered as 'privileged', and which must consequently respect the inviolable 'otherness' of ways of doing things which are not their own. Knowledge is relative to cultural contexts, so that to claim to know the world 'as it is' is simply a chimera –not only because our understanding is always a matter or partial, partisan interpretation, but because the world itself is no way in particular.

This horizontal, postmodern, non-hierarchical playfulness is what constitutes collaboration in this volume, playfulness emphasized by playing with languages, exaggerated attention to grammar and syntactical arrangements, uncovering hybridity and diasporic strategies. All the writings are collaborating to create transnational feminist agency, but in the true manner of the postmodern, there is no agent, no player, no collaborator.

Sixteen years later, in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, "practice" is replaced by "praxis" and collaboration is re-territorialized as the pivot of transnational feminisms. "Praxis is understood as the processes of mediation through which theory and practice becomes deeply interwoven with one another (6)." Praxis is explained in the book as Paulo Freire's liberation as praxis and the feminist idea of situated knowledges based on Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where Freire designates "praxis" as essential to human consciousness. "I shall start by reaffirming that humankind, as beings of the praxis, differ from animals, which are beings of pure activity....but human activity

consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world (Freire 2006, 125).” Praxis, Freire argues, is different from verbalism or activism; neither of these sufficient to bring about revolution. He makes a distinction between revolutionary praxis and praxis of the dominant elite. Interestingly, the way Freire (2006, 126) characterizes the latter, as “manipulation, sloganizing, ‘depositing’, regimentation and prescription” was the way mainstream, western, academic feminism was often characterized by independent, informal feminist researchers and activists in India that I interviewed. They believed that women’s studies degree programs in India and “abroad” were or were capable of creating a managerial or dominant class meant to govern and contain grassroots level movements, through creating exploratory research or movement organizations. These were the people most suspicious about transnational research collaborations that were often exploitative, akin to epistemic piracy. I will discuss my interviews at length later, but for purposes of creating a genealogy, while this suspicion is characterized as a problem of “intellectual” and “political” accountability, the ways to address such problems are few and far between, and almost always “suggested” or “prescribed” by scholars in first world academia, expressly feminist and otherwise.

The hierarchy of the knowledge producers and knowledge systems often remains intact in collaborative projects that relegate non-academic collaborators and researchers to the “second tier of knowledge production” (Swarr and Nagar 2010). Alexander and Mohanty (2010, 28) state that: “Given over two decades of neoliberalism, privatization, and the accompanying commodification of knowledge that marks academies across the globe, the cartographic rules of the academy necessarily produce insiders and outsiders in

the geographies of knowledge production.” Somehow, there is a lack of admission of responsibility or assertion of self interest in the part of feminist researchers in this world system of knowledge production. Feminist knowledge, especially knowledge designated or claimed as women of color feminism, third world feminism or transnational feminism seems to be relatively free or outside of double binds and epistemic injustices. The position of the feminist researcher from the global north, or the metropolitan, or the one-thirds-world remains obscure. Often the narrative achieves continuity in tracing the processes of becoming an insider from being an outsider, gaining trust, being entangled in a web of complex relationships. However, the factors that enable the often long sojourn, allowing researchers to become a part of communities and sharing political commitments, which can range from being over a decade (as in the case of Amanda Swarr and Sam Bullington writing about LGBTQ politics in South Africa) to a few months, as in the work of some of my interviewees—factors and resources, not just financial that allow academic researchers the privilege to stay and work, and travel back and forth internationally are often not disclosed.⁴⁹

This silence on the “one way traffic of research,” not just in terms of ethnography but research evidence and output, and what implications that might have on transnational feminist “praxis” further renders some communities and spaces immobile, deeply and

⁴⁹ For example, in “Disavowed Legacies and Honorable Thievery”, an article in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, Nagar (2010) objects to collapsing the idea of collaboration with democracy, owing to the fact that democracy is not an infallible model of justice. She also questions the “neoliberal university” as an entity seeking out collaboration from the global south. She and other authors in this anthology, namely Sam Bullington, Amanda Lock Swarr and Geraldine Pratt explain their processes of collaborative research sojourn, ranging from the work they did with their international collaborators to their own positionality as outsider-insiders. However, their position within the U.S. academia remains obscure, as does their own accountability to their subjects, as researchers. The subjects are pitted against the unjust ways of neoliberalism, corporate capitalism and exploitative globalization, but never as facing vulnerability in situations where they work with transnational feminist researchers.

“essentially” situated. An example of this immobility and essentiality is found in the works of Vandana Shiva who places rural women in India as belonging to the realm of spiritualism, agriculture and eco-feminism. My respondent R5 believes through her experiences of collaboration that: “We are perpetually cast as gradually “developing” that only a researcher with what is known as the outsider’s advantage (the standpoint of a traveling member of the out group) in sociology or anthropology, can discern. Our spaces become theirs, become vulnerable.”⁵⁰ These spaces of the third world or global south become social laboratories where underpaid fieldworkers or research assistants research themselves: their “culture” including traditions and their “affects”, practices, activism, and politics. They also help researchers from the global north, as fieldworkers, ethnographers, point persons and translators. These particular kind of research practices were experienced by some collaborators I interviewed and I will write about their experiences in my next section.

A transnational feminist text that was published between *Scattered Hegemonies* and *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* is Sangtin Writers’ and Richa Nagar’s *Playing with Fire* (2006). This book created an example of what transnational feminist collaboration looks like between a US academic of Indian origin and activists in Uttar Pradesh, India. Chandra Mohanty introduces this text as follows: “Given the collective politics of knowledge production, transparency and accountability that the *sangtins* enact, it would be ironic indeed if this foreword were seen as ‘authorizing’ the voices of the women in this remarkable book. *Sangtin*, writes Richa Nagar, is a term of ‘solidarity, of reciprocity, of enduring friendship among women.’ The stories in this text enact this

⁵⁰ R5, 2011.

process of becoming *sangtin*—of a collective journey of the personal and political struggle of nine women toward solidarity, reciprocity, and friendship across class, caste, and religious differences in the profoundly hierarchical world of rural Uttar Pradesh.”

In this text, the collaborators are nine women activists from Uttar Pradesh’s Sitapur, deeply involved and embroiled in NGO activism, women’s empowerment projects and varied forms of intersectional, identity politics. Nagar, the Indian expatriate feminist academic from the US, is the translator of a Hindi book titled *Sangtin Yatra*, which is a collective narrative of the *Sangtin* writers, “where they publicly intervened in the politics of knowledge production with an explicit aim of reclaiming the meanings of empowerment and grassroots politics” (Sangtin Writers 2006, xviii). *Playing with Fire* is the translated book, or one sourced from *Sangtin Yatra*, a journey of women NGO workers negotiating the politics and modalities of empowerment. “The title of our original Hindi book, *Sangtin Yatra*, or “a journey of sangtins,” captures the essence of our collaboration while also highlighting the name of the organization Sangtin, in whose name the authors want to continue the work of combining rigorous research, radical activism, and creative writing” (ibid. xxiii). Acknowledging the limitations of translations and authorship in a project like this, the book promises exactly what it delivers, intersectional histories of women-in-development, told, transcribed and written and translated. A process of reciprocity, mutual respect for epistemic agency, constructive disagreements and negotiations emerge as central to this collaborative project.

Elsewhere, reflecting on her collaborative work, Nagar has stated that co-authoring is not the only way to recognize collaborative partnerships. “We must resist an

institutionalization of reciprocity that turns authorship into the *be all end all* of sharing authority, and recognize that multiple aspects of reciprocity, and accountability can be actively built into one project” (Benson and Nagar 2006, 589, italics mine).” Speaking of the question of formal authorship in collaboration and multiple, difficult border crossings, Nagar feels that “the expectation that our collaborators will always want to be co-author, furthermore, assumes that speaking to academic audiences is a priority for all involved and that like Northern academics, their non-academic collaborators in the tropics and subtropics are also invested in securing intellectual property rights and/or recognition by academic audiences” (Nagar 2003, 24). Interestingly, alternative methods of recognition and epistemic agency are not suggested by her; if not formal authorship, then what? The essentialized (sometimes) illiterate collaborators are being brought or represented to the “northern academy” by someone like her, with the faint suggestion that just the plain act of speaking, or sharing or collaborating is what the collaborators desire; just collaborating is an end itself without any further intention of rewards or recognition.

This assumption of “northern academy’s” assumption of formal recognition as the highest goal of knowledge creation is a powerful critique of western epistemology and the corporate university that places a premium on publications, and indeed, makes publication and research output a chief parameter of academic productivity. Publication of collaborative research is no exception, where credit is placed on or assumed by the mediator, the translator and the author. Nagar calls for a more complex and radical understanding of collaboration that understands that the products of collaboration might be different forms of knowledge for different groups of people, that formal recognition or

not, the knowledge still remains collaborative. But placing non-academic collaborators in a perpetual space of selfless knowledge creation without regard for formal recognition or intellectual property seems problematic from the point of view of accountability as well as epistemic agency. The mediator, or the northern academic's intentions behind transnationalizing and publishing such knowledge needs to be made transparent beyond her/his political commitments that push them to get involved in such transborder collaborative projects in the first place.

This act of mediation is apparent in two significant instances of scholarship that focuses on transnational feminisms, *Scattered Hegemonies* and *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*. These texts too, present collaborative writings by academic scholars in the northern academy. A comparative reading of these texts reveals some patterns, such as the shift from collaborative writing to collaborative ethnography or participatory action research. The “we” of transnational feminisms are those who collaborate with people in academic and non-academic spaces, or just “collaborators (Grewal & Kaplan 1994, Alexander & Mohanty 1997, Bullington & Swarr 2010, Swarr & Nagar 2010), “allies, sometimes co-conspirators” (Ugnayaan Ng Kabataang Pilipino Sa Canada et al 2010), “Black activists in the Guyanese women’s association ‘Red Thread’”(Peake and D’Souza 2010), collective reflective political actors (Sangtin Writers 2010), “progressive women artists of color from the third world” (Tinsley et al 2010), eight partners in participatory action research (Barndt 2010). This marks a very interesting shift in the way collaboration is articulated as central to transnational feminism: from *Scattered Hegemonies* to *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*—writing has changed from first

person singular to first person plural. This “we” must be clarified and interrogated consciously, lest it be viewed as a certain poststructural escapism or postmodern fragmentation of authorship that creates problems of accountability.

Grewal and Kaplan (1994) presented *Scattered Hegemonies* as a product and representation of a “writing community.” Editors Swarr and Nagar (2010:14) state in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* that their volume “provides a systematic discussion of the possibilities of collaborations that consciously combine struggles for sociopolitical justice with feminist research methodologies, thereby extending the meanings and scope of transnational feminist theory and praxis.” However, as mentioned earlier, there is no discussion of “methods” of collaboration; the writings continue the task of non-committal articulations of methodology. They justify the lack of “concrete” methods as follows: “The chapters of this volume collectively suggest that collaboration is not merely a set of concrete strategies or models with ethical dilemmas and conceptual difficulties that must be addressed and attended to. On the contrary, collaboration itself poses a theoretical challenge to and potential for rethinking transnational feminist frameworks by creating new spaces for political and intellectual initiatives beyond disciplinary borders, academic/artistic/activist divides, and North South dichotomies. At the same time, the authors resist an impulse to celebrate collaboration as a panacea and remind us that for collaborative praxis to retain its critical edge and radical potential, collaboration itself must be subjected to continuous critical scrutiny so that it can oppose the paralyzing effects emanating from the institutionalization of both academia and activism.”

Through a series of directive or imperative sentences, the authors are attempting to express what collaboration is not or must not be. In this description emerges a definite direction that the process of collaboration must be subjected to continuous critical scrutiny. This passage is reminiscent of deconstruction, in its stress on continuous reflexivity and examination, in its way of being “patient, open, aporetic, in constant transformation, often more fruitful in the acknowledgement of its impasses than its positions” (Derrida 1988, 14).

How useful would such instability and lack of direction be in the face of claiming and re-claiming transnational feminism, in achieving “real” collaboration between worlds and nations and activists and academics? Swarr and Nagar claim that their research questions that brought the volume into existence were: “What forms can transnational feminist collaboration take and what limits do such forms pose? What are the relationships among collaboration and transnational feminist theories in creating new spaces for political and intellectual engagements across north/south and east/west divides? Can collaborative practices consciously combine struggles for intellectual empowerment and socioeconomic justice while also attending to the problem of how northern academic engagements inevitably produce ‘difference’?” As someone trying to understand what and how capable transnational feminist formations can be to exercise socio-economic and epistemic justice the first question seems important and grounded. The last two seem rhetorical, much in the form of assertive or directive illocutionary speech acts.

To further understand these patterns, as well as check the claims of characteristics outlined in published discourses, I have talked to collaborators as well as looked at products of collaboration not circulated or published in the global north. These collaborators have had experiences of working with scholars in the global north, and some of them were able to show me the reports and articles that resulted from such collaborations. Three out of thirteen collaborators are also co-authors. Two of the remaining ten believe that all they did was to collect data, or help in archival research and do not believe that they deserved to be co-authors at any point. One of the collaborators feels that some of her field notes were used in a published article, but she was given neither authorship nor acknowledgement. Five of the collaborators feel that they should have probably received co-authorship, but they were not very emphatic about it. Most felt that because they were paid to do their work, they felt that (or were made to feel that) they did not deserve or need intellectual or publication credit. This mindset illustrates the commodified nature of “data” collected from the global south. Some of these collaborators however, expressed appreciation of transnational feminist work, and hoped to be involved in it, not just as activists, but also as researchers. More about them in the following section.

My critical discourse analysis of transnational feminist literature predominantly produced in the United States reveals sophisticated analysis of scattered hegemonies and tactical polyvalence of discourses, plurality of sites and contexts of resistance and impossibility of representation, problems of authorship and academic capitalism. Yet, such scholarship continues to embody at least two epistemic injustices. First, existing

transnational feminist literature seems to perpetuate the very dyad of “us” and “them” that it attempts to transcend. Transnational feminist texts still seem to indigenize feminist movements located elsewhere, in providing accounts of and building theory from localized alternative, anti-capitalist, eco feminist, self-help movements in third world spaces. The job of observation, research, approval, narration, theorization seems to be designated for academic feminists of the global north or the first world, while the job of praxis, struggle, resistance and activism seems to be appropriate and indeed essential for non-academic feminists of the global south. Even when there are collaborations, the accounts of such collaborative or action research always seem to be produced by feminist researchers here. This constructed location of feminist praxis elsewhere in often indigenous, rural, non-academic spaces fails to take into account the grounded theory produced by feminist academics of the global south, often derived directly from their own activism. It fails to take into account the complex and entangled relationship of academia and activism in a complex diverse democratic society like India where feminist knowledge is often produced and disseminated in liminal, in-between spaces such as feminist research and resource centers which can be neither labeled indigenous, nor NGO-ized. These spaces are both academic and activist without formally belonging to universities or identifying with one specific social movement or organization whose name feminist researchers of the global north are familiar with.

Secondly, while local micro political engagements are valorized as lessons to be learned, the importance of the nation state or constitutional democratic systems which provide the context for local struggles is often bypassed in an attempt to connect such

movements to larger global realities of neoliberal exploitation of women's labor, bio politics and human rights violations. Minoos Moallem rightly points out that in the process of internationalization and transnationalization of women's studies "the significance of the nation as an analytical category in the construction of the global, international, and transnational is undermined" (Moallem 2006, 349). Undermining the nation leads to a significant loss of context while discussing feminisms of a particular geo-political location, influenced by and influencing nationalist, governmental, administrative, legal, constitutional, religious, sexual, environmental and other discursive practices. Other structures of feminist knowledge production, namely those that govern mobility, both physical (immigration) or virtual (information, communication technologies or ICTs), and capital, social and financial, are often not discussed.

Unequal power relationships are also reflected in what forms of research labor are considered skilled and unskilled. That someone working in western academia is automatically understood as the one expending intellectual labor and those in the field as less-skilled fieldworkers gathering data for transnational feminist analysis is a conversation that remains convoluted or just muted. This differential "expertise" in research and search (for data) places knowledge workers in the global south at a relative disadvantage, limiting their access to resources, copyrights and possibilities of new collaborations. The actual material conditions of coalition, collaborations and creation of a transnational feminist knowledge seem to remain uninterrogated. Merely referring to or analyzing globalization or neo-liberalism as conditions or states of exception might not be enough, because the conditions of their operation and diffusion still remain contingent

on very specific economic, technological and political structures, varying nationally and regionally.

With that I proceed to discuss what conversations with research collaborators in the global south, specifically India, reveal. This is a shift from transnational feminist narratives to a phenomenology of collaboration.

Research as “Tricky” and “Suspicious” Activity: Perspectives from India on
Transnational Feminist Collaborations

“Collaboration? With Americans? It’s a dangerous proposition if you ask me!” This was a quick, almost knee jerk response from R11, a feminist archivist in India. Her statement met with nods of affirmation from two research assistants seated nearby, not participating in our conversation but as interested audience nonetheless. The archivist went on, “Transnational research collaborations are dangerous. It’ll be like James Lain, or the Sarah Harris case.”⁵¹

These feminist practitioners, unlike many of their counterparts in the global north, remain unpublished and invisible. Thus, the only way for me to understand their perspectives, in this instance from a specific bordered territory that often occupies transnational/global/third world feminist imaginary, is by talking to people from this particular space, which I did. Why did they call north-south collaborations “dangerous,” echoing Bernice Johnson Reagon’s fear of coalitions with people that might kill you? Why are the James Lain and Sarah Harris cases so familiar and important to them? I had written about James Lain as a journalist. He is an historian from Macalester College who

⁵¹ Interview with R11, taken by author on July 13, 2011 in Mumbai.

visited Pune's Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, an important archive that houses Sanskrit and *Prakrit* manuscripts from various historical epochs of the Indian subcontinent. He collaborated with in-house historians and curators to retrieve data on Shivaji, a Maharashtrian rebel king.

Some years later, in 2003, this institute was vandalized by Hindu fundamentalist vigilante groups. Scholars were manhandled and rare manuscripts were burned to protest Lain's book titled *Shivaji: Hindu king in Islamic India*. This attack on intellectuals, intellectual freedom and irrecoverable intellectual-historical resources was meant to be a stab on the wrist to Indian intellectuals/researchers/academicians who dared collaborate with "Western" scholars who then went back and wrote "objectionable" things about heroes and Gods and kings or any widely revered entities in India.

While nothing justifies the Hindu fundamentalist groups' irresponsible and violent behavior, Lain also violated something in his work. When he wrote about this "case" as a danger to not just his scholarship but his life--because he received life threats over email—he failed to mention the ordeal of his manhandled collaborators back in India, one of them, an historian advanced in age, who was physically accessible to the vigilante groups.⁵²

The second "case" involving Sarah Harris, erstwhile journalist from the *Independent*, is even better known. This story was repeated twice to me, once by the aforementioned archivist, and again, by a member of a feminist research institute in

⁵² Neither did he question or reflect on the selective nature of his evidence in a book that embraces folklores and legends that can be simplistically called sexist, including their humor at the expense of women's moral character and alleged sexual conduct. In this case, my interviewees feel that questions can be raised not just about academic or intellectual freedom but also about the purposes and self-aggrandizing effects of western scholarship.

Andhra Pradesh, as I was interviewing the director of the institute. When this particular member said, “The Sarah Harris case is a good example of such ‘research’ collaboration,” the way she said “research” indicated that she thought that the “research” was not really research or was false or problematic or inauthentic in some way. Sarah Harris, a journalist in search of “spirituality” who traveled to India, made a documentary about some “traditional” sex workers in a village in Maharashtra, a documentary that is allegedly voyeuristic, outs the HIV status of some subjects, twists their words and lifestyles and shows no moral or ethical consideration toward the people depicted, including children. Harris fancied herself a participant observer in the village, taking pictures and interviews and trying to understand the institution of sex work. She deceived the villagers into thinking that she was just an interested tourist.

Harris’ “research” on “temple prostitution” as a “traditional practice” failed to provide a historical, material or sociological analysis of the practices of this village, instead, she created a sensational journalistic product titillating the Western imaginary of India as the exotic land of ignorant, exploitative sexualities, complete with religious scriptures on sex. She underestimated the power of pervasive media to deliver her content to her research subjects, the unintended and undesired audience. Once her research subjects saw what she had done, they were furious.

Soon, there was a video created by an organization in India named VAMP (*Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad*, translated: “Prostitutes’ Collective against Injustice”) who worked together with the women in the village to reprimand the errant researcher. In this video the unsuspecting research subjects yell into the camera, hurt and angry, their

trust broken. “We protected you when the men in the village tried to harass you, laughing at your little skimpy clothes. We told them where you come from, everyone wears things like that, give her a break! We fed you, let you into our homes, talked to you. Who gave you the right to insult us like that, you ungrateful woman?”

Being a journalist and not an academic, Sarah Harris did not have to get an IRB approval, nor did she, it would seem, have a sense of journalistic ethics and responsibility. She never claimed to be a feminist. What was interesting was that my mention of collaboration would elicit that incident in the minds of my respondents in India.

Again, neither of these incidents illustrates transnational feminist research collaborations, yet they are good indicators of what some academicians and social researchers were thinking about “international” research collaborations in the summer of 2011. While several women’s studies professors expressed positive perceptions and experiences of collaborative research projects with women’s studies and other departments located in the U.S. and the UK, exploring comparative feminist/women’s issues, many others talked about the problems that arose that suspiciously escaped the published accounts of the research. These are problems of broken trust, misunderstandings and transparency. Should these complications in the research process be a part of the research literature? “Well, if we were talking about research on biology or mechanics, maybe not. We feminists have rebuked science for not practicing the

objectivity it preaches. Transnational feminist scholarship that claims to embody reflexivity, community and justice, should.”⁵³

There are feminist scholars who would not tolerate transnational epistemic injustice. “I do not allow transnational feminist collaborations!” –exclaimed R7, professor and head of a women’s studies research center and university department in Maharashtra. “I do not do it. And I do not care whether I am considered as someone cowering under anti-western fundamentalist *diktat*, whether we do not have enough money, whether our opportunities will shrink as a result of ...well...this insulation.”⁵⁴ I asked her why. She said that she feels that a research project on migrant women workers working locally, something she is currently engaged in, is aimed to produce literature that will help these workers, and many of them being illiterate, will help community workers who run various projects to provide settlement and safety to these workers. These projects include evening literacy classes, workshops on legal rights (worker’s rights, domestic violence prevention), putting children to school, meal and nutrition programs. This is a study that is designed to produce information on accessing vital resources, provided by state government, NGOs and other administrative bodies. This also uses case studies and narratives of past and present workers’ experiences that workers might find useful. The second stage will be a longitudinal study looking at the effects of government and nongovernmental intervention, what works, what doesn’t. This will hopefully change policy and intervention patterns.

⁵³ Interviews with R12, taken by author on June 21, 2011, and February 27, 2012 in Hyderabad and Phoenix respectively.

⁵⁴ Interview with R7, taken by author, on July 14, 2011, in Mumbai.

“People, from the government, from domestic and foreign universities and civil society organizations are welcome to visit us and access our reports (our website is not always updated, we try). But, we have a system here, and inviting and accepting funding and other opportunities, especially transnational, is problematic.” R7 also feels that too much time is spent in explaining contexts, learning languages, discussing methodology and doing reviews of literature. “*Corporation* here means a public sector semi-governmental undertaking, or a city administration, like a municipality, NOT a capitalist-corporate set up,” said R7. “Because they are Muslims in government documents or in their daily lives doesn’t mean they have no caste. Because these working women have husbands, even husbands that are present in the hut, doesn’t mean they are not single mothers. All these explanations, contextualizations, negotiations...waste our time.” It is difficult to challenge pre-conceived notions about “India” and the “caste system” and “Indian family values” and other universalized processes collaborators bring with them. Even with collaborators who have migrated from India and have more nuanced understandings, R7 feels there is also the risk of being relegated to “non-theoretical” partners, something she has had experience of. “One learns from one’s experience.”

Several organizations and universities including Jagori (New Delhi), RCWS, SNTD University (Mumbai), School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University (Calcutta) and Women’s Studies Center, Osmania University (Hyderabad) are involved in research on women’s lives and realities locally. Many of these research bodies collaborate with governmental, semi-governmental and non-governmental organizations. “That in itself is

complicated enough. To add another layer of transnational exposure, will bring decreasing returns to scale⁵⁵.”

The following are the broad and overlapping themes and perspectives that emerged from my interviews on and study of reports, meeting minutes and other unpublished texts (as opposed to published texts in the global north) that resulted from transnational feminist collaborations in India. These themes are: topics of research and topography of the “field;” issue of authority and authenticity and alienation of the “other knowing subject” and invisible privileges and academic division of labor. None of these themes appears in methodological, experiential and emotional discussions about collaboration in US transnational feminist works.

Topics of research and topography of the “field.” The majority of my interviewees believe that research collaboration topics almost always coincide with research trends on women’s issues that have captured the contemporary global civil society’s imagination and seem exemplified by the abject position of women in the global south.. It was the “girl child” as the “developing subject” for a while, with a focus on the future of humankind and the future of citizenship. Now it is violence, including communal and domestic violence. It might be something else soon. For the last five years, the research topics that have brought feminist and women’s/gender studies researchers together transnationally are ones that reflect broader, NGO-ized global civil society concerns about women as a marginalized people around the world but especially in the global south. Indeed, studying literature and communiqués from international “non-

⁵⁵ Interview with R1, professor of law in a public university in India. She calls herself a feminist, she works as a feminist but understands the deep unintelligibility of that word, to a non-English speaking, *Dalit* woman poet, or an upper caste slum dweller struggling to get a daily quota of clean water.

governmental” “non-profit” organizations, such as the “United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women” or the World Health Organization, reveals a uniform pattern. Women’s problems signified by “gender” as a prefix, namely discrimination, violence, disparity, and reproductive health, human trafficking, and labor issues always seem to be located and concentrated in “developing countries.”

“For once, I would like to see a research project where researchers from India travel to, say the US and try to understand the high occurrences of divorce and/or transient social and intimate relationships. What does that say about the socio-cultural context and gender arrangements in a postindustrial post-normal world?” asked R18. Her argument points at the tired but potent rhetoric aligned or misaligned with the realities of the other, or of the “third world women” that are, as Mohanty (1988) explains, a homogeneous ‘powerless’ group often located as implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems. It is an argument, reminiscent also of Narayan’s articulations in *Dislocating Cultures* where she points at the dearth of data and research on domestic violence inflicted by guns in the US as compared to research on dowry deaths in India that might be much less widespread. The latter deaths are also understood as “death by culture” while domestic violence, especially involving cases of gun violence, are not. In Narayan’s articulation, an imaginary journalist trying to understand “American Culture” through gun violence,

...will discover that her idea about linking “domestic violence” to “American culture” by focusing on gun-related violence against women is not a project easy to carry out, since the two issues seem not to be frequently connected by those engaged with gun-control issues or domestic violence agendas. She might however acquire some interesting “cross cultural” insights as a result of her frustrations. She might come to

see that while Indian women repeatedly suffer death by culture” in a range of scholarly and popular works, even as the elements of “culture” proffered do little to explain their deaths, American women seem relatively immune to such analyses of ‘death or injury by culture.’ Even as they are victimized by the fairly distinctively American phenomenon of widespread gun related violence (Narayan 1997, 117).

Through her thought experiment, Narayan explicates the problem of different frameworks of understanding women’s and gender issues. The context, in the case of the postcolonial, global south, is always one of “culture” and belief systems located outside projects and processes of rationality and modernization, best understood by anthropological explorations. Contexts of gender and other relations including gender violence and oppression in the west are sociological, economical, structural, correlational, psychoanalytical. Feminist movements taking up various issues treat them symptomatically. Quest for a unifying, collective, embedded, “cultural” cause is rare.

The chosen research topics on “other” women, whether as a part of a visible funded research project, or a doctoral dissertation project, often perpetuate the colonial knowledge project of cultural difference where women in the global south become a powerless group to be “saved.” “All I know is when students and scholars from the US visit and want to look through our materials, they are often looking for news clips on bride burning and dowry deaths. They are looking for news on oppressed women under the *sharia*. They are looking for news on temple and other kinds of prostitution. No one wants to learn about sexual harassment at work and public spaces, women in professions or politics, representation of women in the media, wait...no...I guess ‘Bollywood’ is media,” said R14, who works in a women’s research center that houses a substantial

archive in Bombay. She often feels a sense of alienation, leading interested parties through issues frozen in time, relevant, but timeless.⁵⁶

The women she knows, the lower-middle class urban woman, the professional woman, the commuter spending four hours a day at an average to get to and from work, a phenomenon quite common in large urban centers like Bombay, the engineer, the call center employee, the student, the teacher, the server, the small business owner, none of them seem to be of interest to non-Indian feminist researchers. The “Indian woman” subject that must be re-created and re-generated repetitively, for research remains what Mohanty outlined in her essay twenty-four years back: women as imagined victims of male and patriarchal violence, women as universal dependents or in the development process, “developing” forever, oppressed by religion and “culture.” I asked R14 if she ever read Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes.” She had not.

Another respondent, R17, women’s studies graduate student, says on the topic of “research topics”—with some hesitation, “struggles and movements of literate or English speaking, non-starving, working women, those that are fighting their own battles, and evidently don’t need to be translated or saved are not of interest.” The research subjects, both in terms of “subjects” as participants in the socio-symbolic order, and “subjects” as topics, remain confined to issues of historically oppressed and resistant groups. Women in labor unions, plantations, “unskilled” jobs, export processing zones, agriculture and “cottage industries” and other parallel economies, still occupy the transnational feminist imaginary. This leaves out many complexities, many “subjects,” many groups negotiating

⁵⁶ Interview with R14, taken by author on June 20, 2011, in Mumbai.

and reproducing globalization on a day-to-day basis who usually remain invisible and uninteresting.

In academic and other forms of research “field” signifies the “natural setting” of research subjects, or the physical “site” of research. Pierre Bourdieu understood field as a site of struggles between various social actors, a site of play, a site where social agents develop their worldviews and perceptions, positions and actions. He understood field sociologically as “a space within which an effect of field is exercised so that what happens to any object that traverse this space cannot be explained solely by the intrinsic properties of the object in question. The limits of the field are situated at the point where the effects of the field cease” (Bourdieu 1992, 100). Spaces of the global south have often been deemed as “field” or social laboratories by colonial knowledge enterprises.

In the light of such a history, it might be important for transnational feminists to explain their geo-political location and their interest in a “field” which is located in India. For feminist academics of Indian origin, going back to the “field” in search of knowledge and activism is a question that often remains entwined in the spiral of silence. Their travels to the field cannot often be separated from their travels to “go home” or “see family” or “revisit” the land of emigration and land of origin. This web of intentionality remains axiomatic and obvious and sentimental and untouched. For a group of scholars interested in space and identity and the transnational, critiquing colonial, neo-colonial and neo-liberal structures and projects, their own travels to, and choosing of “fields” within the global south remain surprisingly unquestioned. They often provide accounts of

going home, accounts of travel, personal interactions and political organizing, without explaining their interests and intentions surrounding the field.

“If they are claiming to do transnational feminism,” said R 20, women’s studies professor, “what sets them apart would be ideally their comparison of case studies and histories across nations to understand common causalities, patterns and practices. I am always suspicious of fieldwork done in a specific region here (in India), on labor movement, or micro credit disbursement, or a social problem like female infanticide for the sole purpose of producing and preparing narratives and analyses for western consumption.” Of course, such production, such as a doctoral dissertation may or may not be “targeted towards wide academic/popular consumption.” New media deepens global circulation of discourses and knowledge products, written discourses assume a life of their own not completely under the control of the author. R20’s point too was that she is unclear about what sets apart transnational feminists from conventional anthropologists or researchers belonging to transnational NGOs and corporations interested in the “development” question. “I see no difference,” she says, “and it wouldn’t be a problem had it not been for their continuous claims of nuanced reflexivity and anti-capitalist anti-colonial political commitment. And their constant critique and abrupt dismissal of development-minded projects that do more good than they ever can!”

The topography of the “field” in and of India is often a set one, as reflected in recurrent topics researched by traveling feminist academics. A review of transnational feminist literature and my conversations with silent (or globally invisible, allegedly irrelevant) transnational feminist spade-workers reveal the current topics of interest on, in

and about India are the NGO-ization of social movements in India, the study of female labor in spaces ranging from plantations to call centers, the relationship of feminism to caste and other forms of identity politics, gender violence ranging from domestic violence to street harassment and, last but not least, representations of women, gender, nation and nationalism in “Bollywood” movies. The topics have not changed in the last ten years, according to my respondents.

If there are “set” topics that lend well to transnational collaborations, what kind of identities and authorities are prevalent in this form of research, both of researchers and “subjects?” Who claims research interest in transnational feminist issues, often meaning issues only of and about a specific geopolitical location, meaning across the border and one way travel? These questions about identity and authority dominated most of my interviews. From them I extracted several themes.

Issues of authority and authenticity and alienation. With regard to issues of authority, authenticity and alienation of the “other knowing subject,” a question that was raised again and again in my conversations with knowledge workers in India was, “Who has the right to speak, as a researcher and creator of knowledge?” The institution of authority, authorship and copyright operates similarly in most published feminist scholarship, as in the rest of academia. There is re-thinking of this institution and its ethics; claims and theories are generated based on the notion of collaboration and epistemological community. However, the mechanics of authority derived from authorship, or narration, or research expertise often remain invisible in transnational feminist collaboration. The “we” or “us” that appear again and again in transnational feminist literature usually refer

to a group of scholars located in the global north who engage in collaborative research, theorize on such research or do both. In *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, an instance of authority expressed in first person plural reads as follows:

As conversations unfolded among contributors to this volume, the objectives herein came to be threefold. The first was to conceptualize feminist collaboration as an intellectual and political practice that allows us to grapple with the possibilities and limitations of theory as praxis and insists upon problematizing the rigid compartmentalization that separates research from pedagogy, academic from activist labor and theorizing from organizing and performative arts. Our second goal was to combine theories and practices of knowledge production through collaborative dialogues that invite us to rethink dominant scholarly approaches to subalternity, voice, authorship and representation. Last but not the least, the contributors sought to explore how feminist approaches to collaboration can allow us to articulate transnational feminist frameworks and to simultaneously create new spaces for political and intellectual initiatives across socioeconomic, geographical and institutional borders (Swarr and Nagar 2010, 14).

This passage demonstrates that academic collaboration often takes place in the form of a workshop or roundtable where new ideas and paradigms emerge, as researchers converse with each other in physical spaces of ideational exchange far removed from “sites” or “fields” of research, especially if located in the global south. In addition, although discussions on collaboration continuously “raise” issues of knowledge production, voice and authorship, they do not follow up, or ground or address these issues operationally. There is scarce discussion of how the claims and suggestions made would be fulfilled and discussion on academic research as a privileged profession affected by demand and supply trends of post-secondary education and publication market. Finally, some of my interviewees felt that this passage represents a trend of blurring of

boundaries, geographical and institutional that is a rhetorical strategy of intellectual validation that reduces accountability in research.

What does this mean? In the words of R1, who has taught women's studies in universities in global north and south, "sometimes claiming that praxis is theory, theory is praxis, performance is politics and politics is necessarily one of subaltern resistance just helps scholars negotiate publications and promotion, and often identities. The claim that academia and activism occupy the same sites, true as that might be often absolves academics of political responsibility just as it absolves activists of the responsibility to engage in knowledge production and consumption. . . It ends up furthering careers of people located in the North, "native informants" with access, and I am not saying endless access, but access nonetheless to all worlds."

This kind of cynicism is palpable too in the non-U.S. collaborators' experience of reading interpretations, accounts and analysis of research projects they were a part of, an experience that is not common due to various barriers including language and prohibitive costs of books and journals. Many interviewees feel that the reflexivity and community embraced in published works by scholars from the global north are not indicative of their conduct as collaborators. The question of unequal power and differential access to resources almost always remains an abstract disclaimer. There is little to no effort on the traveling scholar's part to explain her/his "positionality" or "position" on epistemology, research ethics or collaboration to the domiciled "partner" in knowledge production. The conversations are mostly on what the researcher is looking for and what expertise the partner can provide to fulfill the research mission.

From this perspective, “transnational feminism” or even just “feminism” can often be seen as an ideological imposition, a necessary but undesirable import. Knowledge workers in India, whether located in autonomous research centers or university departments, have dealt with the struggle of understanding, using and applying paradigms, processes, terms and logic that are unfamiliar and incongruent with the issue in hand. Yet the issues need to “fit” the theories that have been theorized, the imaginary woven, the frameworks and “topics” deemed important in a distant world. “And these worlds are distant,” says R7, “not discussing the distance and the material and other privileges determined by transnational geographical and other locations does not make them any less real. Especially to us, the paid, glorified fieldworkers.” The question of “national” and nationalities in transnational need to be re-inserted for purposes of “plain honesty, academic honesty if you will” remarked a respondent. Frameworks prefixed by “post” and “neo,” including postmodern and postnational, neoliberal and neo-Marxist, often used in wake of “transnationalization” of feminisms and feminist studies in the US, represent a problem to most current and potential collaborators and claimed “allies” of US-based feminist scholars.

On the other hand, the flow of ideas is not always north-south as most of my interviewees claim, neither is the cognitive and global cultural permeability always from “above” as Spivak claims. Several academics told me that in transnational research transactions, not just monetary, but interchange of ideas and terms and plans, they, being located in spaces of the global south have felt a sense of having or exercising more power. “It is the power that comes from being in the field for long, being well known and

being the *expert insider*.” Power, in these planning stage exchanges, and in decisions about the final product is not unilinear as Spivak and other subaltern studies scholars would suggest, averred a respondent; it is a complex, multidirectional movement including researchers from both “sides”, laws governing disbursement of foreign funds for research, and administrative staff members. There is a lot of room for negotiation at every step.

This power derived from perceived “authenticity” also firmly locates and defines researchers’ works and expertise and once such a reputation is established, it is very difficult to be able to collaborate on something else, diversify research interests and perform research outside of one’s assigned spatial or thematic boundaries. “Transnational feminist researchers claim ‘transnational’ or ‘international’ or ‘global’ expertise based on their comparative research that uses and builds on our work, but we here, for various reasons including directions of flows of global capital and other resources, remain firmly entrenched as ‘local’ or ‘regional’ experts.”⁵⁷ Research centers and researchers acquire expertise on a certain area, such as “Indian Women in Electoral Politics” or “Women and Law” or “Women and Violence” and this visible expertise channelizes funds that forces them to focus only on such research. “Forces” is a strong term but it is used by many interviewees. “We are forced to keep generating research on the land rights movement and women in *panchayat* politics. Our project on women in traditional theater productions withered away due to lack of funds.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ R4, 2011.

⁵⁸ R5, 2011.

Alienation within the process of collaboration is an experience that stands out in many of my interviews. Alienation in the Marxist sense is the sensation and experience of workers' powerlessness, lack of control, ownership or joy in their productive capacities. In modern industrial production under capitalist conditions workers will inevitably lose control of their lives by losing control over their work. Workers thus cease to be autonomous beings in any significant sense, alienated from their work, their environment and finally, themselves. Knowledge workers in India whom I interviewed spoke about their alienation in transnational research collaborations. A striking account came from R1's reminiscences about an invited workshop on women's/feminist/gender studies somewhere in the U.S.

I went to a certain university in the U.S. for a feminist workshop and later, a regional conference focused on women's studies and feminism. In the workshop, we discussed postcolonial theories and subaltern studies, the latter discussions rife with accounts of women's universal experience of family, statist and communal violence. There were sophisticated analyses of lived experiences of highly visible characters of fiction and "real" people. I tried to raise the issue of a young law student who had been raped by law enforcement personnel. Her experience was not well known, her urbanity and education rendering her not subaltern or oppressed enough, and people just looked at me like I was taking up unnecessary space, breaking up the familiar discourse on events familiar to them. Towards the end I felt like my chair was floating on water, that all of this was unreal. The theories, the physical voices of deep concern, the accents, the circularities in arguments. Anything I knew, had worked on, or believed were systematically if unconsciously ignored.⁵⁹

There are stories about racism in critical race studies conferences and ethnocentrism in feminist and area studies conferences that knowledge workers from India have attended in the global north. They have felt limited by the expectation of

⁵⁹ Interview with R1, taken by author on July 12th, 2011 in Pune.

“topics” and “issues” they can speak on. My interviewees’ experiences reflect what Trinh Minh-Ha expressed in *Woman, Native, Other*, speaking on role expectations placed by the western academe on “other” scholars, “Now I am not only given the permission to open up and talk, I am also encouraged to express my difference. My audience expects it and demands it; otherwise people would feel as if they have been cheated: We did not come to hear Third World member speak about the First(?) World. We came to listen to that voice of difference likely to bring us what we can’t have, and to divert us from the monotony of sameness. They, like their anthropologist whose specialty is to detect all the layers of my falseness and truthfulness, are in a position to decide what/who is authentic and what/who is not” (Minh-Ha 1989, 14). This point about detecting truthfulness is salient more than twenty years after this piece was written; collaborators traveling to the Global North for conferences often feel that their position in the panel was one of evidence exhibit. What they had to say was not nearly as important as their very presence signifying that a real transnational collaboration had taken place with real people.

Invisible privileges and academic division of labor. Scholars from India do not have to travel all halfway across the world to experience this alienation; they have felt it in their usual lifeworlds and workspaces, as they have been approached for collaboration and their familiar worlds have become “sites” of interest. Two accounts in my interviews illustrate this process of being authentic. One experience was related by R12, a sociologist with global visibility who does work on women and gender, and another by R25, an activist and independent publisher of feminist and women’s writings.

The sociologist talks about how her book project was stalled by Sage on the allegation that it did not have “international relevance.” She had to fight tooth and nail to get it published. She decided on her reviewers, suggested a business model (“sell paperbacks in India”) and fought against the charge of there being no diverse or feminist sociological traditions in India (the subject of her book). Her edited anthology was an example of transnational feminist collaboration, where her collaborators left her in the lurch once the project ran into troubled waters. “Two things I learned,” she said. “One, intellectual worthiness and marketability are indeed a content of geography, and two, that no one wants to rub a publisher like Sage the wrong way.”

Another experience has to do with what respondent R19 calls “politics of pronunciation.” She says that while dealing with distributors and potential authors or reviewers from the U.S. who are willing to do feminist collaborative publication, a “British accent” helps but an Indian one, not even one too regionally impacted, has a disadvantage over the telephone. The politics of pronunciation can also manifest itself when in a situation of public exchange, someone speaking to a non-U.S. speaker resorts to not understanding our accent when s/he cannot make a cogent argument or chooses to disagree. R1, whose quote about her experience in a transnational feminist conference above, feels that “Pardon?” or “Can you repeat that?” or “I didn’t get that!” can be powerful attempts at silencing the speaking subaltern. She says that a potent method of marginalization could be asking the person sitting next to the listener, instead of the “unintelligible” speaker herself, “What did she just say?” This act of asking someone else is disconcerting because it shows that the listener doesn’t want to engage with the speaker

on equal terms and wants to garner support for her act of confusion. This act or pretense of confusion might or might not be an attempt to gain support in one's conscious act of ethnocentric intolerance. Will this "politics of pronunciation" ever form a part of transnational feminist discourse? Perhaps not, because some acts of discrimination are hard to present as "evidence" of hegemony or intellectual coercion.

R12 said: "India is like a special export processing zone for western academic research," she said, "we have much to offer, much that sells. Our labor is cheap. Our graduate students are underpaid and would not mind working for a fraction of salaries paid to research associates there, earn extra income as fieldworkers." She also mentioned about the prevalent flouting of research norms "like the flouting of so-called fallible, dispensable environmental norms in the third world by the West."

R12 is probably not talking about all transnational feminist research, or all feminist research, or all research that involves north-south collaboration ("there are ample horror stories in south-south collabs too!"), but not all disciplines claim such strict normative adherence to epistemic justice and egalitarian research ethics as feminists and now transnational feminists do.

Concluding Discussion:

Spaces of the Global South as Research Export Processing Zones?

In this chapter I raise questions on epistemic production and epistemic justice inherent in collaborative projects and attempt to outline the issues that are largely, consciously or unconsciously, kept silent. The problems and struggles, especially on the part of research subjects/collaborators located in the global south, are definitely present

across the board of collaborative research projects taking place in India, in disciplines as varied as geology and sociology, history and cultural studies. Framing this discussion within transnational feminisms is not meant to frame it as a case of colonial misappropriation or knowledge-piracy. Instead, my suggestion is that transnational feminists are in a position to create applicable research norms and principles that can be hopefully adopted in other disciplines. Perhaps transnational feminism can lead by examples, and not merely precepts.

This chapter presents an analysis of discursive practices of collaboration found in transnational feminist texts originating and circulating in the U.S., and comparing these accounts to verbal accounts provided by largely unpublished, often non-academic feminist researchers who act as collaborators.⁶⁰ Silence on the material, economic, individualistic bases and intent of research defended by prolific discussion of power/knowledge, activist and political intent and self-positionality vis-à-vis research subjects and “corrective steps” towards epistemic justice does not account for many invisible injustices. And accountability is definitely a visible rhetoric in transnational feminist literature. Some of these lacks of accountability and occurrence of injustice made one of my respondents from India compare third world research “sites” and acts of transnational collaboration, as belonging to “special research export processing zones.”

The critical discourse analysis in this chapter was useful as I analyzed findings from interviews on collaboration. Critical discourse analysis uses speech acts in oral

⁶⁰ Uncovering the stories of transnational collaboration requires analyzing published as well as unpublished texts. I started with studying published, visible, available texts, leading to conversations with researcher-collaborators, to understand material and lived geo-political contexts. These conversations are critical texts that shed light on many un-articulated unpublished aspects of intellectual collaboration.

communication and discourse and thematic organization in printed text to analyze causalities and ordering and social processes that shape and are shaped by discourse. The six main recurrent themes and texts within transnational feminist collaborative scholarship and scholarship on collaboration are: identity, travel, authenticity, silence, language and negotiation.

Uncovering identity politics and implications of “return travels,” “travel home,” and transborder transmigrations by diasporic feminists of color who form the majority of transnational feminist scholars, is essential to transnational feminist methodology. The notion of the variable location of the subaltern is important in interrogating and writing about the mechanics and politics of transnational feminism. The subaltern as one who works in and from a geo-epistemological space, collaborating with those outside such space, is often misrecognized, misappropriated and obscured in the global unequal meaning making processes.

The feminist subaltern collaborator occupies spaces of struggle, hybridity, instability and multiple modernities.⁶¹ Antonio Gramsci refashioned the meaning of subaltern in a non-military sense, as the class subject to hegemony and state power. This was reflexively embraced by the scholars of the subaltern studies group in India and postcolonial studies clusters elsewhere to connote the oppressed, the non-elite, the

⁶¹ I have used Spivak’s notion of the migrant subaltern, the new subaltern who has access to many elements of global commodity culture a stake in colonial culture, language and polity complicates the notion of the subaltern. In the context of transnational feminist endeavors, the women’s centers need upward permeability, as Spivak suggests that the subaltern does not have, forever at the receiving end, forever the object of research and consumer of theory produced elsewhere. Assuming any political position is fraught with problems of representation and interpellation, but fear of dilemma, language, categories, and essential identities should not stand in the way of taking a situated critical position or crafting a theoretical standpoint, especially one that points out epistemic injustices and suggests ways of redress.

disenfranchised. In India the indigenous people conveniently labeled as “scheduled tribes” by the British and independent Indian governments, those of the lower classes and castes, women oppressed under patriarchy strengthened by processes of colonialism, capitalism and now globalization constitute the non-essentialized subaltern assemblage and political actors.⁶² This assemblage becomes the critical mass of collaborators, in addition to academics and researchers in elite universities.

Authenticity is an issue tied to language as well as location. Many forms of feminisms in India, such as those practiced in women’s research and advocacy centers in urban areas in India often get written off by feminist theorists and activists both in India and the U.S. on charges of not being marginalized or indigenized enough. Operating on tight budgets, accepting no aid from governments or transnational donor agencies, not a part of the university system, not conforming strictly to the NGO model of activism, reliant on the backbreaking work of a few volunteers and members and community support, these research centers often remain obscure to researchers here and charged of elitism and/or stylized activism amidst feminists and other social movement groups there. Meanwhile they continue to produce research on poverty, caste, violence, health, law and jurisprudence, to make such research accessible though awareness-raising

⁶² As an upper caste middle class migrant student, I am situated in a matrix of privilege/disadvantage that may or may not be deemed subaltern (enough). As someone who has assumed roles of a feminist political laborer, a nameless activist, an NGO worker in India, I claim partial situated knowledge of plural Indian feminisms and resist essentialized homogenized notions of both Indian women and Indian feminism in the Western academe. I disclose my privileged position as an upper caste graduate researcher in Indian and well as US academia, and my claiming of a subaltern position is in no way an attempt to act as a mediator or voice of subalternity and indigenesness, what Gayatri Spivak (1999) calls “native informant” or “national-cultural broker”—what Edward Said calls “a hero rescuing the orient from obscurity”—and Uma Narayan explains as “Emissary, Mirror and Authentic Insider” positions. I wish to clarify the present precarious position of the intersectional, new subaltern in India and elsewhere who cannot occupy familiar positions of marginality, such as indigenous or tribal, lower caste or rural.

campaigns and materials and work with the women and the disadvantaged in the local community.

This chapter outlines some “lacks” or silences in the existing theoretical corpus on the collaborator and the subaltern knowledge-maker. Not all lacks are problematic, nor silences unnecessary, but the silence of feminist theorists located in India on the notion and essence of transnational feminism, vis-à-vis their work in their countries of origin is something my research interrogates. Silence on researchers’ class, locations and other privilege are as important to reveal in scholarship as their disadvantaged positions, problems in conducting research and other dilemmas. The current trend in transnational feminist scholarship of collapsing theory and praxis rhetorically, just because the theory-praxis gap is seen as problematic is unhelpful. Many of my interviewees believe that the goal could be to interrogate this gap or hierarchy between theory and praxis, activism and academia. Only then can we understand that each of these realms has its political and epistemic usefulness. This collapse is often made by making an argument about positioning all knowledge systems, from every region, and “fields” at par. This position merely reinforces the binary of “theory here, activism there.” Theories produced in the global south thus largely continue to remain invisible and unimportant to feminist academics in the global north. Theorists also take over the realm of praxis rhetorically by positioning all academic writing as activism or praxis, without explaining how.⁶³

⁶³ Articles in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* exemplify this trend. In the introduction, the author-editors call for “refuting individualism and reclaiming collaborative praxis” (Nagar and Swarr 2010,6). However in their work, or other authors’, e.g. Rachel Silvey, discussing her transnational feminist film project or Jaqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty discussing studies of race, colonialism and empire use praxis as the way to collapse the academic activist divide. Activism can take many forms, including film and academic work, but if not explained “how,” then the possibilities remain of activists without

Mediating, and editorializing and analyzing and presenting “voices” from the global south for global (and primarily western) academic consumption seem central to transnational feminism, and this research engages in that too. As a complementary practice, it would be helpful to campaign for bringing original texts written in English from India, which can form a part of the corpus of circulated transnational feminist scholarship. I have spoken to owners and workers in feminist presses in India who insist that their English publications are not aimed at a global or U.S. market. “Chiefly because there is no demand. Indian feminist writing in English upsets many western assumptions about oppressed third world women and is hence not desirable.”⁶⁴ These assumptions range from ignorance of- to inauthenticity in English, deemed to be a foreign and elite language in the Indian context. The third world woman is assumed to speak a language that is authentic and somewhat translatable. R3, owner of a small feminist press averred that import of feminist scholarship from India will upset the current market for publications based on collaborative feminist scholarship in the US. “Mind you, it is already a very small, specialized market,” she said. I will discuss more on the politics and economics of production and distribution of feminist scholarship in my concluding chapter.

What about the books NOT published in English? R 20 said that a well translated “voices” are preferable to a mediated, selective one. In other words, to understand the

visibility of circulation having their identities and work subsumed under the label of transnational feminist praxis, claimed and created by U.S. academics.

⁶⁴ Interview with R3, taken by author on July 19, 2011, in New Delhi.

issue of women's political participation in India, a political autobiography by someone should take precedence over a project organized, researched and written by a western academic, based on interviews and often posited as collaborative research conducted in India. "Many things are lost in translation, many things remain obscure, but sometimes acceptance of such obscurity and un-representability might be a good training for a privileged knowledge community used to unravel everything, every mystery of other cultures and spaces in lengthy footnotes," said R11. Another interviewee, R 14, suggested that this culture of footnoting should be replaced by "the kind of hybrid writing undertaken by Gloria Anzaldua in *La Frontera*. People, instead of consuming *the other* in palatable and intelligible languages should exert themselves as they read. Find out a few things by themselves."

In *Playing with Fire*, a text I analyzed in my genealogy of collaboration, Nagar states: "In an era of global mediation, the significance of languages cannot be underestimated in any political discussion of knowledge production. Indeed, the discursive divides between the spaces of the "vernacular" and the spaces of "elite languages" have never been so critical in defining the landscapes of survival and struggle. These gaps themselves have provided the locus for articulating many movement-based critiques of uneven development and disenfranchisement caused by globalization. The politics of language has, in fact, fueled and enabled each phase of this collaboration" (Sangtin Writers 2006, 152). This is a radical statement robbed somewhat of its critical radicalism by not explaining what this politics of language is and why it was enabling in a research project based on translated and mediated "voices." This awkward silence on

“voices” and representation could be broken by means of hybrid, critical and creative writing practices, exemplified by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, or movement texts or proclamations, followed by a research report as produced by several women’s center in India such as *Shaheen* in Hyderabad or *Jagori* in New Delhi working on violence and gendered poverty. However, if such collaboration is between U.S. academics, and academics/activists located elsewhere, IRB translation norms will perhaps leave very little room for experimentation with language, just as current style guidelines do not facilitate crediting of collaborative knowledge production efficiently. One cannot insert the names of a large number of collaborators for publication credit. This also raises questions about the relationship between authorship and knowledge creation.

Any collaboration or coalition is a constant process of negotiation, of identities, or recourses, of creativity, of authority, being involved in a research project based on gathering perspectives from “elsewhere.” There are positive stories from India, stories of satisfied research assistants—satisfied with their compensation and experience of involvement in transnational research projects. I even got reprimanded by R6, “Yes the power relationship is unequal but please do not suggest (in your work) that we (in India) are always at the receiving end of injustice. We too wield power, we negotiate, we set our own terms and we are keenly aware that we are in the position to differentiate, say caste from sub-caste politics and provide a coherent comparison between the experience and discourse of racial marginalization and resistance and the *dalit* politics.” Struggles over

power, over voice and over authority and authenticity. Collaboration is always a process fraught with conflicts and negotiation.⁶⁵

The question of identity politics needs to be made central to transnational feminist knowledge. This politics can provide both accountability and rationale to transnational; feminist collaborative work. Rather than de-valuing theory and claiming praxis, which ultimately amounts to a publication with limited readership, efforts could be made to develop a methodology, if not theory of collaboration, drawing from works of feminists of color, subaltern feminists, feminist sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and other scholar-activists who do not neatly fit any discipline or realm of knowledge production legitimized by western academia, NGOs and markets. Moving beyond “attempts” and awkwardness, making authors’ geo-political positions and intentions as well as politics transparent in research projects can ensure some accountability as well as epistemic justice. Wahneema Lubiano states “If ‘we’ who are the feminists of color can engage within our circumstances in the self-criticism that recognizes not only where we are different from the more powerful group, but where we actually replicate their misunderstandings, their blind spots, and their exclusions, then ‘we’ who are feminists of color, after beginning the work of self-criticism among our groups and in our communities, can use the insights gained from that work to promote alliances within the group. And from that work itself we can make possible the ‘imagining of alliances’ between communities within the US—as well as outside its borders. Such work might

⁶⁵ I have often heard from both “here” and “there” that collaboration in the end benefits everyone. “If nothing else, students are getting some research exposure,” said another professor, about a grad student fieldworker she had hired in India to work for her. “I paid him. Had this been an internship, he might not have been paid; the experience would be the compensation.” Stark and precise as this reality might be, this justification of buying research labor is bothersome.

require picking our way through binary oppositions instead of simply dismissing them as unproductive; for such oppositions help make up the political imaginary of communities. And whether or not groups recognize the same vocabularies, political work rests on imagining strategies for one's own politics" (Lubiano 2001, 449). Collapsing oppositions such as "theory and praxis" or "us and them" or wishing them away will only serve to reinforce such binaries or make them invisible.

Chapter 5

Virtual Citizenship and the Transnational Feminist Discourse

The information age behaves less like Noah's flood, washing away the evils of industrial capitalism and leaving behind a playing field that is clean, smooth and level, and more like Hurricane Katrina. Katrina revealed, with great violence and human suffering, the desperate inequalities sedimented over decades through bad policy, human indifference, and oppressive institutions. That the blinders of the privileged were only temporarily torn away during the Gulf Coast catastrophe should remind us that the work of social justice must be conscious, daily, personal and collective work. It is ongoing, terrifying, glorious, immense. It takes clear vision. We know the flood is coming. We know the levees might break. The rising tide of the information economy does not lift all boats: it sinks some, destroys others, and drowns the boatless.

-Virginia Eubanks, in *Digital Dead End: Fighting for Social Justice in the Information Age*

Technology, specifically information and communications technology (henceforth ICT) mediates and makes possible the creation of transnational feminist knowledge and collaboration. In the core of most transnational feminist articulations is the desire for collaboration, the desire to recreate or reclaim what is loosely known as global civil society and the desire to understand hegemonies scattered by globalization, postcolonial displacements and multiple modernities existing on a coeval space- time plane. In this chapter, I explore the role of ICT in transnational feminisms and the processes of transnationality. Transnational feminist scholarship as understood in the North American academy represents a slowly shifting but specific set of frameworks, often identified with a certain diasporic, postcolonial, subaltern feminist consciousness and intervention. In South Asian academic spaces, understandings of transnational feminism are inextricably tied to issues of globalization, structural adjustment programs and global networking.

Transnational feminism seems to be inextricably tied to the “future” of academic feminism and women’s studies, just as ICT or the “information age” is increasingly understood as being central to the future of organization of selves and societies.⁶⁶

In my exploration of multiple meanings and silences of transnational feminisms in the U.S. and in India, I have been somewhat surprised at the absence of a discourse on transnational cyber feminism, on the centrality of the Internet as one of the material and real conditions of transnationality. Participating on cyberspace in a range of political activities can constitute what I call virtual citizenship, although this participation is often derided as “slacktivism.” However after the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movements and the recent national outrage by millions of people in India and around the world over gender violence and the state’s inaction following the gang rape of a student in New Delhi, the Internet has seemed to emerge as a civil society platform. It is impossible to not take questions of citizenship and democracy into account while exploring the potential of the cyberspace as political and polemical. Feminist presence and participation in the Internet is an important but underexplored phenomenon in transnational feminism.

The Internet as the site as well as method of research, as an episteme and “given” of transnational being, as something that makes the “transnational” in feminisms and other movements possible, seems like an under-researched tract and one of the few silences and absent references of transnational feminist thought that as a theoretical and praxial framework continues to gain validity and relevance in U.S. and well as Indian academia. In this chapter I aim to interrogate and understand cyberspace as an epistemic

⁶⁶ For Transnational Feminism as future of academic feminist field development see Kennedy (2005) Datta (2007) and Joseph et al (2005) ,For ICT and how it shapes and will continue to shape societies see Castells (2005) and Gajjala (2004, 2012) Blair et al (2004)

site and online communities as epistemological communities; interrogate and understand the relationship between online and transnational feminisms, and conduct critical discourse analysis of selected transnational feminist knowledge produced and disseminated online.

“Situating” Cyberspace /Cyberfeminism in the Postmodern Transnational Matrices

Feminist or any discourses that are generated on the Internet are by definition outside conventional academic and non-academic places of knowledge production and publication. The Internet represents spaces that cannot be assigned strict geo-political locations. That outsider origin aligns such discourses with a postmodernity that is a part of the operations of transnational culture, as Grewal and Kaplan (1994) assert. The postmodern turn and the transnational turn in feminist knowledge are connected by the common threads of multiple perspectives, and understanding of hegemonies and truths as scattered and fragmented. The four “I-s” of feminist methodology, interdisciplinarity, intersectionality, intersubjectivity and intervention, are reformed and reshaped as a result of these related “turns” through an understanding of knowledge as paralogy that can subsume the logic of academic and social norms of knowledge production.⁶⁷

Cyberspace provides rich possibilities of performance of national and gender identities, justice and feminisms. It creates the condition and context for communication, often taking the place of “travel”— an important constituent of transnationalism. In my research the Internet emerges as the essentially postmodern and possibly critical feminist

⁶⁷ Paralogy is an essential element of postmodernism, a movement against and beyond unified reason. I refer to paralogy here to explain how ICT changes knowledge. Lyotard defines postmodern as incredulity toward meta-narratives of philosophy and science (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). Knowledge in a postmodern context is fragmented in plural paralogies, informed by a sense of justice that is independent from consensus.

site and method of discourse production. The Internet can be viewed as paralogy, as spread, as subversion of solidified assumptions and structures of any knowledge and hence feminist knowledge. It embodies postmodernity: as a matrix of multiple existing, rhizoming, shifting modernities, not something that's happened after one specific kind of modernity.⁶⁸ To achieve epistemic justice and equity, especially in a transnational context, a feminist analysis of late modernity and postmodernity vis-à-vis ICT might be essential.

My conviction is derived from theoretical reflections and my interview data, where twenty out of twenty-five respondents believed that the new media is essential for global feminist exchange and resistance mobilization. However, my survey data was equally split between the ones who believed ICT to be central to transnational feminisms and ones who did not. More respondents from the global south supported the potential of ICT as civil society and space for feminist exchange than those located and working in the global north. Given the issue of differential access this presents an interesting dilemma and space for speculation. I explicate my evidence guided by the following questions: What is the relationship between conditions of postmodernity and cyber-connectivity, the two conditions of transnational feminism or transnationalism? What are the feminist and/or transnational feminist responses to ICTs as a condition for intervention? In current prevalent transnational feminist scholarships, ICTs are definitely an under-researched, under-theorized phenomenon.

⁶⁸ I borrow the notion of Rhizome Theory from Deleuze and Guattari (1980), because ICT represents the ideal rhizome, a space where gender and activism can be performed but not necessarily embodied, a space of rupture, a space of multiplicity and connections. Rhizomes, in addition, challenge the idea of a monolithic modernity.

The postmodern turn creates shifts in epistemological agency, as ICTs are used and diffused globally. To explain my theoretical position, I turn to a foundational text on postmodernism, a text on and named *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Contextualization, or “situation” of the postmodern is important, and I am attempting the same in interrogating yet another axiomatic feminism, an ideology that calls itself “transnational feminism.” Frederick Jameson’s cognitive mapping in the foreword to *The Postmodern Condition* is helpful to understand the abstractions of the transnational postmodern condition.⁶⁹ Jameson avers that the official subject matter of *The Postmodern Condition* is the role of technology in knowledge creation. Placing “knowledge” in the category of lawful social reproduction, Jameson allows us to understand the postmodern turn better, the same turn that produces virtual citizenship and transnational feminisms.

To understand online knowledge production practices as postmodern and transnational, it is important to understand that Lyotard’s opposition to master narratives is produced “in the wake of a certain French ‘post-Marxism,’ that is, an enormous reaction on all levels against various Marxist and Communist traditions in France, whose prime target on the philosophical level is the Hegel/Lukacs concept of ‘totality’” (1984, x). Jameson, in his introduction to *the Postmodern Condition* situates Lyotard’s vision of knowledge as not search for consensus but instabilities. Lyotard explains the new

⁶⁹ Mapping, or development of cartography, for Jameson, does not merely address new geographical or navigational problems. It introduces a new coordinate, that of relationship to the totality as it is mediated by ‘fixed’ units such as stars. “Cognitive mapping in the broader sense comes to require the coordination of existential data (the empirical position of the subject) with unlined, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality” (Jameson 1984, 90)

communication technologies as revolutionary in production and circulation of knowledge, just as advancement of transportation systems had unprecedented impact on circulation and mobility of humans.

Of course, unless the “public” is given free access to technology and data banks, the vision of negotiated paralogy, perfect information circulation, informed political decision making and language games that will advance pluralist knowledge and “creative turmoil” cannot be realized. This understanding of computers as postmodern can be easily extended to understanding the “cyberspace” as “post-space,” as a kind of queer, hybrid intersubjective space of mediation where the self (or selves) exist as textual body, taking on a virtual identity and citizenships of the “transnation”, becoming what Butler calls “subjects of desire” emerging within discourses that do not always follow the rules of conventional epistemic production.

The queerness of cyberspace lies in its potential of displacement, of undoing and rebellion.⁷⁰ This displacement of and rebellion against traditional structures of communication, broadcasting, publication and circulation (of knowledge, discourses and emotions) make cyberspace “a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the super-savers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories” (Haraway 1991, 181). Also, quite literally, the Internet becomes the space for

⁷⁰ Queering has been explained in terms of “undoing gender” by Judith Butler (2004) and in terms of oppositional identities, confrontation, breaking down of monoliths and dichotomies by Suzanna Danuta Walters (1996).

“transnational cyberqueer productions,” in other words a space harnessed by activists for sexual citizenship to get their point across, to create a global movement (Bachhetta 2002).⁷¹

Within literature on new media as a gendered space, questions are raised about digital divides and access to technology contingent on intersectional situation and play of identity categories such as gender, race and class (Scott et al 2001, Nakamura 2002 Mendez 2008, White et al 2001, Eubanks 2011). However, there’s also discussion on the possibility of creating new feminist “counterpublics” on the Internet using cyberspace as a site for engaging in activism and political work that would be not possible for marginalized groups in conventional public spaces and civil societies (Smith and Kollock 1999, Eubanks 2011). There is an understanding of the Internet as “international” or transnational, connecting geo-political spaces, aiding exchange of communicative action across and between nations and their citizens (Kramarae 2009). The Internet has also been understood as a site for colonial, postcolonial and transnational encounters (Queen 2009, Zukic 2009). It is also a site, from which expatriate communities can have a say in political outcomes in their countries of origin (Ong 2006, Puar 2007).

⁷¹ Note that Bachhetta questions the class and gender privilege associated with being on the cyberspace and using it to further one’s goals. However her research looks at New Delhi of the 1980s. My fieldwork, over 2011 and 2012 shows a greater integration of online activities in the feminist and queer activist and academic communities. All of my respondents from India are net-users and believe in virtual citizenship in some shape or form, gathered from their own experiences. Official statistics on internet use often fail to grasp this integration and spread of ICT, because it often uses first world parameters of ownership (rendering those who do not own a connected computer, a non-user, and counting shared devices used by hundreds as one user), and speed (all slow dial up and other connections that are merely slow and not useless not taken into account as evidence of technological integration). While questions of access and fallacies of technological determinism will and must enter all discussions of the democratic/activist potential of ICTs, they cannot and should not act as a reason to write off such technologies.

Cyberspace needs to be understood, therefore, as an episteme, an epistemological site situating epistemological communities and collectivities. A community of “knowers” and knowledge producers exercise their epistemic agency on the Internet, as bloggers, commenters, forum contributors, senders of email and other forms of communication. Typing the word “knowers” in any word processor returns a squiggly red underline indicating spelling/grammar errors, and the absence of this word from most dictionaries, might be connected to the historical understanding of *the knower* as the individual observer or gatherer of knowledge. Feminist epistemologies as well as conditions of postmodernity have made this knower, as well as knowledge (another word grammatically wrong if plural) fragmented and diverse, situated and shifting (Haraway 1988, Potter 1993, Hundleby 2012).

Feminist epistemologists have long grappled with the notion of the epistemic agent, or the knower, or the “subject,” who is either “the” abstract disembodied subject of foundationalist epistemology or the continually shifting “subjects in process” emptied of epistemological and political agency by the postmodern turn in feminism. Tuana (2001) argues that participation in communities and intersubjective interpersonal interactions are essential to the creation of knowledge, that knowledge is relational. Nelson (1993) argues that evidence and experience are fundamentally social and that communities create conditions for and acquire knowledge. She does not deny that individuals can *know*; she instead argues that “communities that construct and acquire knowledge are not collections of independently knowing individuals; such communities are epistemologically prior to individuals who know” (Nelson 1993, 124). This social model

of epistemology forms the basis of transnational feminist knowledge production.

Transnational feminisms evolved from earlier models of feminist internationalism: namely, international feminism, global feminism, multicultural feminism and multiracial feminism. Each of these related theoretical bodies of knowledge was created by feminists in conversation with each other, and through inter-, cross- and multidisciplinary dialogue between varied social sciences and humanities.

Prior communities exist whether or not scholars and activists lay claim to such community membership. Recent articulations of transnational feminisms place a lot of stock on cross-national and transnational, transborder and cross-worlds collaboration, keeping in mind that the current conditions of globalization have created worlds within one another, that global north and global south are not merely geopolitical terms or discrete spaces. Yet, the authority and authorship of transnational feminist thought remains with scholars and scholarship that are privileged to travel and effect intersection of worlds and perspectives in their work. This centrality of “travel” from a principal location within the global north and “transmigration (the act of migrating back and forth from one country or geo-political space to another), remains a silent referent or signification of transnational feminism, as does the question of access to technologies of epistemic production. ICT, although complicated by digital divides and differential access to social and material capital, is becoming a primary and pervasive way to “connect,” create and sustain epistemological communities, including feminist and transnational feminist ones.

The germinal discourse on cyberfeminism seems so suggest that cyberspace and ICT represent paradigmatic shifts in feminism. VNS Matrix, an Australia based feminist art movement group started using the term and also created a cyberfeminist manifesto in 1991, which they later turned into a “bitch mutant manifesto” in 1996. The first cyberfeminist international in 1997 in Germany argued for a feminist search engine, form coalitions with feminist technologists and programmers and refusal to define cyberfeminism except by negation. The initial cyberfeminist goal was to get women and feminisms on the Internet. To claim cyberspace as a feminist space where “we see art with our cunt we make art with our cunt...we are the virus of the new world disorder” as the first cyberfeminist manifesto declared (Hawthorne and Klein 1999). Cyberfeminism has been understood as a philosophy (Paterson 1995) a radical online pedagogy and digital rhetoric (Torrens and Riley 2009; Hocks 2009).

Cyberfeminism also develops in spaces where technological access cannot be taken for granted. “There are several approaches to cyberfeminism,” Radhika Gajjala (1999, 617) states, “What all cyberfeminists share is the belief that women should take control of and appropriate the use of cybertechnologies in an attempt to empower ourselves. Cyberfeminists seek to use Internet technologies and to create spaces on-line that are empowering to women. We believe that the Internet is a feminist issue and are interested in possibilities for activism and research on it. Cyberfeminists are multimedia producers, e-mail list-administrators or moderators, programmers, web-page designers, and women who actively engage in all kinds of on-line synchronous and asynchronous

spaces. We are also concerned with issues related to the designing of software and hardware.”⁷²

According to statistics released by the International Telecommunications Union, Internet use as percentage of inhabitants is 7.5 for India and 79 for the U.S. (in 2010). Other sources peg this figure as 8.4 in India and 84 for the US, the percentage usage or penetration ten times as much in latter country. Substantial and instructive as this gap is, it still amounts to a hundred million users in India, and ICT is often viewed as a window or indeed a gateway of opportunity and connectivity, a gateway to receive, remake and reclaim the global. “Whatever the reasons, whether they seem just or unjust, it is undeniable that, within today’s global context, people of the South need to remain connected with the North if they are to gain access to various power structures,” according to Gajjala (1999). “Women who wish to re-empower themselves and have access to such structures do need to learn to use and access different kinds of technologies” (Gajjala 1999, 618). Of course, she, like many other scholars, follows up that pragmatic observation with a question that many feminists have asked, whether access to ICT will lead to a rise in empowerment, democratization and social justice (Gajjala 1999, 2004, Nakamura 2002, Eubanks 2007, 2011, Tsaliki 1999).

Feminists have debated the meaning of empowerment and democracy, as well as technology and development, analyzing them to be domineering, hegemonic and

⁷² In her paper titled “Third World Perspectives on Cyberfeminism” Gajjala looks at the multiple possibilities and politics of the cyberspace from a subaltern perspective. Gajjala’s description rather than definition, of cyberfeminists frees cyberfeminism from an art movement rhetoric of –“we see art with out cunt we make art with our cunt...we are the virus of the new world disorder” –a polemic statement from the first cyberfeminist/bitch mutant manifesto that was perhaps historically necessary, as well as (unconsciously) exclusionary.

masculinist, both in the global north and global south. My conversations with feminist knowledge workers in India reflected what I understood as utilitarian utopia or what I have elsewhere described as dismissal of “Position of Privilege (POP) critiques” seen as emanating from the “west.” Feminists located in autonomous research centers and universities almost unanimously supported diffusion of ICTs in schools and households, communities (in cybercafés and resource centers) and on persons (in the form of smartphones, for example). “Over here, we do not have time or inclination to endlessly debate over the meaning of technology penetration or digital divide. Vein splitting. So there is a divide, I say let’s work towards bridging it. Let’s demand hardware and software and technology training from the government, from university authorities, from the software companies bent on doing charity,” opined R14. She went on, “we have digitized our library catalogue, we provide Internet access to users, and we use Jstor and access a lot of journals online. The Internet has become invaluable and indeed indispensable for teaching and research. The online forums provide a wealth of information!”⁷³ She later asked me if it would be possible for me to send her articles occasionally since I must have access to “everything” through my university library. “It gets expensive!” She reflected pensively, “You are lucky to be in a space of unfettered access to all kinds of academic resources.”

Blank Noise, an Indian street harassment intervention project that started online advocates use of new media and ICTs innovatively to identify and resist sexual harassment, while recognizing that a lot of such harassment is also enabled by technology (such as taking pictures on a camera phone without permission, in turn the subject can, if

⁷³ R14, 2011.

she's carrying a camera phone, click a picture of the harasser and send it to the website to effect "public shaming"). In India as anywhere else, the relationship between feminism and technologies remains tense. Yet, there is a sense of claiming and using technologies, not discarding them. "If you hear some of the critiques of technology by western feminist writers who probably cannot survive a day without their coffeemakers and laptops, you sense an inherent hypocrisy there. Such critique to me does not seem productive. Do you know how many female software engineers there are in India, working here, and "on-site" in the U.S.? Do you know how many women depend on DTP and other computer based work to be self-sufficient?⁷⁴ The IT boom has not only transformed our economy, but the notion of 'work' and livelihoods forever, for women." This came from a consultant who works with women's organizations to increase IT literacy. She, like many others, believes that ICTs are central to transnational feminism because they allow "ideas to flow and travel and end up in places they'd never be ten years back. With a computer connected to the Internet and your knowledge on how to work it, the world is your oyster."

To analyze the substantial impact of ICT on livelihoods in India is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, from published scholarship and interview data gathered from feminist epistemological agents, the following observations and connections can be made, which I will support further with digital ethnography of online knowledge communities that are essentially transnational.

⁷⁴ DTP stands for Desk Top Publishing, an occupation embraced by many middle and lower class computer-literate women in India.

Cyberspace as a Site of Expanded Citizenship and Democracy. Cyberspace can be seen as an emergent space of citizenship and democracy that reconfigures the notion of “space” as well as political agency. Politics becomes dissociated from a grounded, landed notion of community, and citizenship can be separated from its classical liberal frame of male, able bodied, breadwinning, propertied individuals. The “demos” of this transnational democracy can instead be anyone with continuous or intermittent access to technology, citizens becoming *netizens*, voicing their concerns and effecting communicative action through an alternative medium.

Problematic and paradoxical as they might be, democracy, liberty and social contract provide a favorable context for gender justice and human rights. Democracy, as Iris Marion Young (1990, 92) points out, “has both instrumental and intrinsic value” which facilitates interest group pluralism, widespread participation in the political process and distributive justice. Feminists in India running research and documentation centers feel that knowledge and awareness of democratic processes and identity politics are imperative for full-fledged “national” and “transnational” citizenships. Use of technology to create, disseminate and debate over knowledge (as my digital ethnography of some websites will reveal) can enrich the political project of feminism, social justice, equal rights and social transformation. “Our feminisms have historically developed in contestation as well as conversation with the society and the state machinery to struggle for the rights of women and marginalized groups that have been systemically discriminated against. On the Internet, our voices will be a tad more difficult to stifle,” said R9.

This understanding of technology as possibly democratic and feminist parallels? feminist theories of citizenship and democracy. Feminisms are located in the political terrain of what Young names insurgency. Young (1990,83) categorizes insurgent campaigns and movements into three categories: “1)those that challenge decision-making structures and the right of the powerful to exert their will; 2) those organizing autonomous services; and 3) movements of cultural identity.” For her, democracy is essentially insurgent. The perceived and relative anonymity of the Internet allows for insurgency to thrive, whether it is religious fundamentalism or transnational feminism.

Ruth Lister (2003) avers that a nuanced, multilayered conceptualization of citizenship loosens its bonds with strict geopolitical borders, “so that citizenship is defined over a spectrum that extends from the local through to the global. In particular, the notion of a global citizenship, which reflects at the international level the rights and responsibilities associated with national citizenship, offers a tool to challenge or at least temper citizenship’s exclusionary power (Lister, 2003, 196).” Cyberspace, being essentially transnational and “open,” can facilitate this “tempering.”⁷⁵

Cyberspace not only bridges the divide between self and others, it allows a necessary re-articulation of the speaking subject.⁷⁶ It provides a space for speech

⁷⁵ Lister states further as she sums up other feminists’ arguments on citizenship (2003,197): “Underpinning these theoretical dichotomies, as well as women’s exclusion from citizenship, has been the rigid gendered separation of public and private spheres. Within this separation, public and private have represented respectively universalism, justice and independence on the one hand and particularity, care and dependence on the other. The rearticulation of this public-private divide thus provides one of the keys to challenging women’s exclusion at the level of both theory and praxis.”

⁷⁶ Psychoanalytical and French feminist understanding of structures of language and subjectivity are helpful to understand the “in-between”, the liminal nature of cyberspace where subjects become “cyberconduits” transforming themselves and dreaming to transform the world, such as a blogger from Iraq collapses her private and public self (Pierce 2010).

and citizenship. Cyberspace can allow citizens a platform to articulate themselves and their rights, whether it is the case of a nameless thirteen year old girl writing about how she stood up to her street harassers becoming “an action superhero” on Blank Noise or the blogs on right to education written by Malala Yousafzai that almost cost her life.

Both the structuralist and discursive models are helpful to understand the specialized spatiality and symbolic realm of cyberspace where hypertext and html codes make the “grammar” or the rules of communication accessible and modifiable. Lacanian psychoanalysis posits a certain otherness innate to each speaking subject in its struggle to master the symbolic order, because its consciousness is constantly betrayed by the overflow of the libidinal reservoir of the unconscious that it borders on. The subject is both the subject and the object. Lacan demonstrates how individuals are split between the symbolic and imaginaire, between desire and the law, and how the first experience of sensing the ego is also one of loss, splitting and demarcation.

Thus the Internet can be theorized as l’imaginaire, not real but not fully, rigidly symbolic either. Where the responsibilities of the speaking subject are fluid, and citizenship duties are composed primarily of communicative action and reaction. Where power, “produces reality. It produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault, 1977, 194) and “is the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a particular society” (Foucault 1979, 93). In this case, we can

imagine a transnational network society. Can this society be understood as or as a part of a global civil society? I examine that possibility as follows.

ICT as Facilitator in a Global Civil Society. Technology is created and distributed in gender encoded terms, yet, in understanding, using and recreating technologies, it is possible to break some of these codes. I should emphasize here that in analyzing my data on technologies of transnational feminism, I ascribe a “political quality” to civil societies where “civil society is treated as an autonomous sphere of social power within which citizens can pressure authorities for change, protect themselves from tyranny, and democratize from below” (Foley and Edwards, 1996, 46).

Thus civil societies can be spaces of mobilization of social capital and exchange of ideas and communicative action. Feminist interpretations of the civil society as separated from the state yet inaccessible to the general public and Habermasian communicative action as naïve and bourgeois has discredited any social justice claims made in or by civil societies (Fraser 1990, Spivak 2000). Manoranjan Mohanty (2008, 82) sums up the ambivalent nature of civil societies in the global south precisely:

‘Empowerment,’ ‘civil society’ and ‘democratization’ form the new package of liberalization discourse which on face value responds to the long-standing demands of struggling groups. In practice however, each of them has been given a restricted meaning and has been oriented to serve the present global drive of western capitalism. Civil society, for example, has come to mean those organized groups who pursue their demands in the pluralist democratic process. So the objective of the dominant western forces is to promote interest group politics to take part in the bargaining process while the state maintains law and order. The state in the third world has become inefficient, corrupt and bureaucratic, therefore civil

society should take over the task of development—that is how the argument runs.

I showed this passage to some of my autonomous feminist/women's research center respondents, pointing out that the critic in this case could not be categorized as having a "western" position of privilege (POP). My respondents pointed out three things: first, that it is possible to transform the "face value" to intrinsic value. Second, if democratic politics and interest group politics were in the interest of state and western domination, what other form of politics is left? Finally, it is precisely because the state has become inefficient that a re-invigoration of civil societies is so significant. All three of these counter arguments of my respondents are connected to viewing the new media as creating alternate spaces of resistance and counter-publics. New media de-territorializes location and being of civil societies as regional or narrow interest group politics and allows for creation of alliances and intervention that can cut across identity and geo-political categories.

Cyberspace can become an informal arena of democracy and constitute a form of global civil society by engaging a critical mass of "counter public" and encouraging participatory virtual citizenry (Cornwall & Goetz 2005, Travers 2003). Cyberfeminism right from its inception as an underground art movement has claimed disorder, and de-centering of authority. Digital ethnography of "Indian" cyberfeminist websites such as Blank Noise and Ultraviolet however demonstrates a desire for order, the kind of order that ensures safety of women and marginalized groups. Change was one of the fond radical hopes behind development of cyberfeminism, a phenomenon I discuss in the

following section, attempting to understand whether or not it is, or can be categorized as transnational feminism.

ICT as Catalyst of Transnational Feminist Epistemological Agency. With that, we are back to the question of feminist epistemology and how cyberspace creates a specialized context for it. I use the expression “transnational” as a prefix to globalization-sensitive, collaborative, international, connected feminisms but “global” as a prefix to a similar form of civil society or civil societies in order to eliminate the shortcomings of “global feminism” that preceded transnational feminism. By “global” civil society I mean autonomous public associations and interest groups with an inter or transnational presence and connectivity that are working for and supporting social justice not directly part of or controlled by the state or transnational governing organizations.

Mindful of the issues of digital and other divides and shy of making grand claims of revolution, some women’s and feminist communication and networks on the web originating in and about spaces of the global south, can be understood as knowledge-making and a form of civil society formation. This can be understood as a feminist-democratic intervention. The knowledge produced and discourses circulated in and by these websites need to be understood as formation of a transnational feminist discourse de-centered from academic spaces of the global north. Contemporary transnational feminist discourses essentially include online feminist interactions and interventions, writings, art and other productions as newer, diffuse feminist epistemological formations and unprecedented epistemological agency. It’s difficult to separate the online and transnational because ICT creates necessary but perhaps not sufficient conditions for

transnational feminist exchange. In “doing” transnational feminism, very few can mobilize the capital and privilege to effortlessly travel across or between many borders, creating and studying the trans- and cross-national context.

Ultraviolet, Manushi, Countercurrents, Blank Noise and Others: Feminist Hypertext

In this section I explore instances of feminist virtual citizenships and epistemological agency, and attempt to position the Internet or cyberspace as a site of re-organization of citizenship, belonging and transnational feminism. I examined four websites:

<http://ultraviolet.in/>, which firmly proclaims an Indian feminist position;

<http://www.manushi.in/>, the website of “Manushi: Journal of Women and Society” (the oldest feminist journal in India, now fully online); <http://www.countercurrents.org/>,

which publishes articles both embracing and denouncing feminism; and

<http://blog.blanknoise.org/>, which uses cyberspace to resist and raise awareness about street harassment as a form of oppression that hinders women’s presence and participation in public spaces. On these websites, texts become social action, social history, and a source of critical discourse. New media becomes a hybrid in-between intersubjective space of mediation where the self (or selves) exist as textual body, political actors and epistemological agents.

Ultraviolet: Feminist Cosmopolitan Metropolitanism. Ultraviolet started as a blog on the wordpress domain, aiming to be an interactive collection of writings by young feminists. It started in 2007, as an initiative of a Bangalore-based women’s rights organization, but has since drifted from its women and law frame to become a space where young feminists come together to discuss various issues that affect the lives of women in India,

and increasingly, elsewhere. Recognizing “women in India” to be a problematic universal, the website stated: “Women experience their lives from multiple locations and there are many different feminisms. *Ultraviolet* provides a place to explore and understand the ways in which young women in India are challenging, negotiating and transforming unequal power structures. It is also a space to celebrate women’s histories, wisdom, creativity, laughter and love for life.” It expressly seeks youth support and readership: young women as writers and readers, going through lives of tradition and modernities and postmodernities shaping and being shaped by globalization in India. It further stated that “Violet is the colour of feminism. We wanted to be very clear that this is a feminist blog and not ‘just another space for women’. Feminism is a much misunderstood and maligned word. Over the years, its true meaning — the advocacy of women’s rights on the grounds of sexual equality — has been distorted and defiled by many. This blog is both a reclaiming of the term and a clarification of what it means to us, today.”

Ultraviolet represents cosmopolitan metropolitanism, where relating with “the other” does not transform to intersubjectivity but instead becomes a form of cultural relativism. It represents a merging of the worlds, where critics and writers in the third world occupy the same position of privilege as writers in the first world. Yet they often refuse to recognize that leveling in a bid to claim a subaltern “critical” or “sensitive” standpoint. The website further states: “Ultra Violet, if one takes the slangy definition of ‘ultra’, means extremely violet. But ultraviolet also refers to what is situated beyond the

visible spectrum. This blog is also an attempt to explore such regions of shadowed knowledge and understanding.”

This widely-read feminist blog in India and elsewhere lists the following categories under which entries and articles are filed: Self; Art & Culture; Govt & Politics; Law & Institutions; Work & Economy; Relationships & Marriage; Media; Society and Our Bodies. The articles, written often in editorialized “blog” format, in first person, analyze and provide opinions on current news from feminist standpoints. There are also poems and first person narratives. The current issue, accessed multiple times in January 2013 has discussions on the New Delhi gang rape incident, and rising violence against women in India. It outlines present, past and future protests where thousands of urban women take to the streets to campaign against violence and for legal recourse. It also applauds the work of the “Men against Violence Association (MAVA)” an organization where men are trained to talk to men about gender violence.

R22, who is involved with *Ultraviolet* tells me: “there is very little instance in the world of men standing up for women’s rights as visibly as they do in India. The feminist movements in India have always been supported by a large number of men. Also, how many people take to the streets in the U.S. to protest against violence, by the state, a society obsessed with guns, and a misogynist dating culture that leaves many women traumatized?” I mention that there are instances of protests, but as seen in the initial stages of the “Occupy” movement, these campaigns are often not publicized by mainstream media. “There you go, she says, “the Internet definitely provides a platform

for men and women to express their thoughts, to try out their ‘rebel’ selves virtually before they plan a street campaign.”

Transnationalism of the website is also rooted in comparative accounts of women’s situation worldwide, India remaining a constant space of stock-taking. Also, fifty percent of the authors who disclose their location do not presently live in India. All the authors are of Indian origin however. The participating audiences, those that comment are members of Indian diaspora, and Indian metropolises. Elite as this space might be, there is a sense of comparison. Its archive of contemporary women’s issues in India and the world can serve a pedagogical purpose. I know instructors of transnational feminism in the U.S. and India that use this website to demonstrate the state of Indian feminisms in conversation with others.

Despite their refusal to be just another space for women—presumably referring to popular cultural products, like women’s magazines and fashion and recipe websites—*Ultraviolet’s* feminism is deeply situated in and emanating from lifestyles of educated urban middle and upper class young women, discussing their experiences, and experiences of others as represented in the news media. The desire to seek commonalities and the desire to engage with issues does not seem to be translating into a desire for transformation or intervention. However, it should be stressed that unlike transnational feminist scholarship, they do not make tall claims of transformation.

Ultraviolet presents a curious uncritical criticality, especially in personal narratives where the author asserts a right to like being a housewife or travels alone for pleasure. The posts and comments are critical of existing social practices and neo-

patriarchies, of globalization and MTV culture, of sexual harassment, violence and inadequacy of laws, yet there seems to be no discussion of power, of economic class and caste, of location and access, or of social capital. In first person narratives especially, this lack becomes prominent: a lack of identifying how structures of oppression and transnational processes constitute subjects, or the “self” as categorized by the website. This self of autobiographical sketches and anecdotes remains the choice-making, free self—urban, cosmopolitan and diasporic—critiquing the government and the “rich folks” but not interrogating the authority of the authorship or the absence of “other” experiences. Instead, writers typically assume “the others” to be silent, hence needing voice and representation. That stance often characterizes feminist analyses, including those by transnational feminists. This framing, “speaking for” or speaking about the “other” of modernity, postmodernity and transnationality, the “others” of the cyberspace, the unconnected, the inaccessible, the subaltern is critiqued but still prevalent in various strands of critical theory, including transnational feminism.

However, *Ultraviolet* is making no claims for searching or re-searching the excluded of mainstream feminism, or representing them or theorizing about them, an ethos that also operates in transnational feminist writing. *Ultraviolet* is unabashedly feminist, only if feminism is a lifestyle of choice. It provides a much needed archive and catalog of feminist writings and endeavors online and on the ground. Class, location and social capital might be some of the absent references, but *Ultraviolet* provides a platform for various young feminist voices engaged in micro politics, existing individually or collectively in tension and coalition with other forms of interventions that do not get or

seek cyber-time and space. As the longest existing transnationally oriented feminist blog in India, reminiscent of the fragmented third wave of feminism in the U.S., Ultraviolet definitely deserves special mention.

Mansuhi: Shunned Feminism. *Manushi* is the oldest existing English language women's studies journal in India. I cannot call it feminist, because the founder-editor Madhu Kishwar (1990) shuns that expression as an unproductive western stereotype. I use women's studies here as stripped to its basic meaning--the study of women, women's issues, women's identities and subjectivities, women's standpoint and epistemologies, women's experiences and realities. While Madhu Kishwar has become a controversial and indeed dubious figure, falling out of favor with many feminist writers and organizations in India and worldwide, the Indian Association of Women's Studies considers *Manushi* to be a relevant and important journal. While the editor and many writers of *Manushi* are academic-activists, the journal is not affiliated to any academic association or institution; it is run by a non-profit trust. *Manushi* started in 1979 as a journal for women and society. In 2007, *Manushi* had to stop publishing its paper edition, due to various political and economic pressures, and went online. Today its operations are completely online, it has its own domain and has actually mobilized the cyberspace to carry out gender justice work. Like many women's organizations or movements in India, *Manushi* has drifted from its women or gender only frame to,

... finding effective solutions for the economic, political and social problems confronting us in India today through patient study, a non-partisan approach, live interaction with the people concerned, and culturally sensitive, informed activism. We take inspiration from the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi, and believe that we need creative application of the essentials of his philosophy to our contemporary society to meet the challenges of our times, not dead and

deadening ideologies. It is essential that we contribute to the creation of a conducive atmosphere for the peaceful resolution of social conflicts. *Manushi* aims to provide a platform that would provide space both for intellectual quests, investigations and debates as well as activist interventions. One of our consistent endeavors has been to bridge the divide between analysis and activism, rather than pitch them against each other. A rich and live interaction between analysis and activism is necessary for the healthy growth of both.

The word “women” only appears on the masthead, it is a space for varied campaigns and reforms, supervised by Madhu Kishwar. The campaigns range from fighting for street vendors’ rights to environmentalism. *Manushi*’s cyber-presence has benefited its operations in an unprecedented way. The journal always had a transnational audience. Now with the website and a separate blog by the editor and listservs and online books and video sales, *Manushi* represents a successful cyberfeminist venture which has wide domestic and international readership. Subscribers to the print version of the *Manushi Journal* ranged from female prisoners in the United States to academicians in New Zealand. The fact that *Manushi* has a history of vigorous, polemic offline presence (it is known for its street campaign projects and sit-ins, fighting for the rights of street vendors, women commuters, and the general electorate and its volunteers and activists have been subject to state violence), serves to strengthen its online persona. Its struggle for environmental rights (clean water), true democracy (including resolution of the Kashmir problem) and gender justice (women’s right to land and safe occupations) makes it visible and praised in United Nations circles.

Manushi embodies an inclusive approach that makes it attractive as a popular as well as critical/intellectual/parallel women's journal.⁷⁷ There is something for everyone. Kishwar feels that this broad scope is a form of inclusive knowledge creation. The articles, essays and reviews, neatly organized and archived presents a way of understanding women's and other minority groups' interface with the state, and globalization, important areas of focus in transnational feminist thought.

However, *Manushi*'s popularity with transnational organizations (such as UNDP) and its tendency to reference Hindu religious texts and traditions in its articles and campaign texts has earned it a "religious right" and elitist reputation. Amidst radical feminists, and the left-liberal intelligentsia, *Manushi* has been all but excommunicated. R10, who is involved with *Manushi* refutes these claims by stating that the left liberals and feminists are quite elite themselves and that a knee-jerk writing off of anything religious or spiritual in a country that constitutionally grants religious freedom to all is as problematic as uncritically accepting everything religious. *Manushi* embraces a kind of nationalism or Indian-ness that raises red flags in postcolonial circles, which believe that all nationalism is good during colonial rule but suspect after. Madhu Kishwar's vocal anti-Westernism seems to align her with Hindu fundamentalist forces that pronounce the "West" to be the root of all evils such as feminism and homosexuality.

⁷⁷ *Manushi* creates and catalogs writings on "Arts/ Cinema/ Community Initiative / Culture/ Diaspora / Discrimination/ Domestic Violence/ Economy/ Education / Environment/ Family Laws/ Governance / Hazardous Occupation/ Health/ Herstory /History Human Rights/ Intercommunity Conflicts / Jammu and Kashmir/ Liberty and Livelihood/ Literature / Mahatma Gandhi/ Malgovernance/ Media/ Migrants / Minority Rights/ Other Countries/ Peace and Security / Police Atrocities/ Politicians and Politics / Prostitution/ Protest Movements Public Policy / Religion/ Research Reports/ Scheduled Castes and Tribes/ Science and Technology/ Social Justice/ Women and Politics/ Women and Work/ "

The abovementioned tensions mark *Manushi*'s virtual citizenship and cyber-being as it continues to do its job of research, policy recommendations, advocacy campaigns and resource sharing. *Manushi* is not simply a journal; it is an online community that operates through Google groups and email listservs. It presents a substantive example of what Gajjala (2004) terms "cyborg diaspora," online communities of postcolonial (trans) nationals, where the Indian critical-intellectual "self" is constituted by technologies of communication and representation. "Feminism" is expressly and apparently too limiting a term for such a self.

Countercurrents: Radical Left Activism. Countercurrents.org represents one of the oldest Indian activist cyber presences. It was started in 2001 as a political blog and has now transmuted to a critical news website that documents, catalogs and editorializes news about social movements and social justice around the world with a special emphasis on events in India and global events that have a disproportionate implication for India. It is the only website of its kind identifying with the "new left" that has a sidebar tag of "gender and feminism." The website says:

The objective of Countercurrents.org is to spread awareness about this crisis and search for meaningful solutions. We believe that energy intensive globalization should end and it must be replaced by a low energy, ecologically sustainable local economies. If humanity is to survive, the destructive system of capitalism and consumerism must be replaced by an economic system which is based on just equitable distribution and need based use of resources. We strive to reach this goal with our motto, which is "Educate! Organize! Agitate!"⁷⁸

"This crisis" indicates an aggregate of debt crisis, unemployment, social tensions among communities, growing human rights violations and unprecedented

⁷⁸ See <http://www.countercurrents.org/> for details.

ecological degradation, climate change and resource depletion. *Countercurrents* suggests that the ways to mitigate these (in)human impacts on earth are to spread awareness about this crisis and “change the way we live.” It takes upon itself to spread awareness and critical thinking through cyber-intervention.

Originating in India, *Countercurrents* has an international audience. It is focused a lot on U.S. domestic and foreign policies, and names globalization as “of the dominant, by the dominant, and for the dominant.” The U.S. is seen to embody this dominant force that is destroying the world using everything ranging from drones to cultures of dependency. The commissioned articles on globalization are informative and analytical, written in an accessible yet scholarly fashion. This website links to a free online translation service to allow readers to access content in their “own language.”

The gender and feminism section of this website is an eclectic mix of short articles that often have a citations section and read like abridged versions of academic essays. Recent articles include critiques of sexualized narratives about violent women, the violence and pervasiveness of capitalism and the gender question, Islamic feminism, and the role of schools in early gender identity socialization. There is a selection of linked articles published elsewhere on the web on women’s and feminist movements, gender and sustainability and women’s history. There are also articles that editorialize and analyze current news from India and elsewhere. The authors are Indian academics and journalists, independent researchers and NGO workers and activists from around the world.

The organizers of the website in their press releases continuously emphasize the need to mobilize students as a critical mass of change-workers. The beginning of such change work, they aver, is to start being aware. The website is committed to spread this critical awareness on U.S. imperialism, gender/feminism and human rights, issues central to transnational feminisms.

Countercurrents represents critical comparison, pedagogical intervention and reciprocity. Unlike Ultraviolet, it does not leave out *dalit/adivasi* perspectives, neither does it editorialize and mediate these perspectives. These are published, and discussed. Class and political economy continue to frame the discussion, unlike Ultraviolet's erasure of class, or Manushi's focus only on the "lower working class" as a policy failure. Focused mainly on issues of violence, globalization and the political economy, this website is a repository of transnational feminist knowledge with a comparative, outward-looking perspective.

Blank Noise: Feminist Counterpublic. *Blank Noise* represents active feminist resistance and intervention against street harassment, known as "eve teasing" in India. Such harassment, common in public spaces of South Asia, interferes with women's ability and need to use and inhabit streets, public transport, parks, shops and other areas of recreation and livelihood. It was started in 2003 by a group of women in Bangalore who envisioned use of new media to create "a personal reaction to street sexual harassment." This project involved blogging and workshops, art installations and confrontation strategizing to make public spaces safe for millions of women pedestrians and commuters in India. The website explains: "The first phase of *Blank Noise* dealt with victimhood. We began with

a series of workshops, which explored the public and private identities of . . . nine women. This collective participatory experience evolved into an installation that included video, sound and photographs. With this installation Jasmeen [founder member] tried to address the victim, the perpetrator and the silent spectator as members of the audience. The next phase involved public confrontation. . . . In its current stage, the project has a diverse set of participants, who include college students, performance artists, researchers, young professionals, etc. We are currently working on public interventions that are performative in nature. This stage of the project has us disseminating and questioning the law (particularly Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with outraging the 'modesty' of a woman).”

Blank Noise, whose motto is “I never ask for it!” takes a multi-pronged approach to a very serious issue that is pervasive and harmful for women, yet underrecognized by media and academe. In fact, frivolously named “eve teasing,” popular media often conflates it with flirting or a customary part of heteronormative socializing, thus trivializing it. *Blank Noise* is actively working towards legal reform by identifying and changing the popular language and rhetoric for such harassment. It also raises awareness for victims, perpetrators, bystanders and law enforcement officers, who routinely fail to recognize the disturbing enormity of this problem and its implications.

By proclaiming “I never ask for it,” *Blank Noise* draws attention to a misogynist historical trend in perceiving any sexual abuse, from rape to harassment, as the fault of the victim. *Blank Noise* asks its readers to discard and send the clothes they were wearing when they got harassed to create an art installation that critically and creatively responds

to the allegation of “provocative dressing” on the part of the women who got harassed. Displaying the vast variety of clothing and accessories worn by victims, *Blank Noise* demonstrates that there is no particular kind of attire that “invites” such behavior. Rather than focus on the victim’s body, the spotlight should be on the perpetrators’ adherence to the doctrine of patriarchal privilege. *Blank Noise* also opposes “victimization” and victim narratives and instead equips women with strategies to deal with harassment and invite stories of heroism and resistance. These strategies range from filing a First Information Report (FIR) with the police to clicking a picture of the harasser to post on the website.

Blank Noise does not claim to be feminist, neither does it claim not to be. R20, who has been involved with *Blank Noise* for many years, says that the feminist label might repel men and “we do not have the privilege to create a separatist movement here.” This goal oriented project has a transnational presence and stands in solidarity with other projects of similar kind, such as Holla Back NYC or feminist blogs such as Feministing. *Blank Noise* engages in transnational exchanges of ideas, strategies, and discourses and creates new knowledge that will help women locally, on the ground, without claiming a transnational or cyberfeminist position. It represents a feminist counterpublic that claims and facilitates civil rights for women when the state and social order fails such women, when gendered laws and administrative protectionism are not enough or productive. It represents new spaces of democracy and civil society formation that cuts across identity categories and identity politics, embodies insurgency and intervention (Travers 2003, Young 1990). It declares: “Every blogger that has participated in our campaigns has built

the project. Every email, every public response shapes the project. Blank Noise believes that you are the agent.”

The transnationality and feminism of the website lie in its campaigns for gender justice and its ties with similar organization worldwide. As I have explained in Chapter two, feminisms in India go by many names. Not subscribing to a “feminist” label, or shunning that word for various reasons including the anxiety of being subsumed under western discourses, is not a testimony to an organization’s “un-feminism.” It might instead emphasize that organization’s commitment to inclusivity, of solidarity with men, illiterate people, *adivasis* who often cannot relate to the word “feminism.” This is a space of mutuality where men recount their experiences of suffering from, and standing up to street sexual harassment. This is a space where, as R20 points out, “men become action heroes by staging a protest in Bangalore, wearing skirts, saree and other feminine clothing to protest against the longstanding social and governmental viewpoint of ‘provocative’ clothing causing sexual harassment. This is a space where a woman working two shifts recounts her experience of beating up her harasser in her workplace or the street, before filing an FIR.” Blank Noise embodies the Comparison-Pedagogy-Reciprocity (CPR) model by allowing exchange of ideas and strategies, teaching and raising awareness about sexual violence and resistance, and nurturing reciprocity through creating a many-to-many model of interaction, something that the Internet makes possible technologically.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Please see chapter 5 for a discussion on the CPR model.

Concluding Discussion: Cyberspace as the Site, Method and Condition of
Transnational Feminism

In this chapter I compared how each website connected in some way to women's/feminist movements and discourses in India, contained and created knowledge on global gender issues, and aligned with or added to transnational feminist discourses. If transnational feminism is about praxis and decolonization, engaging in epistemological and democratic struggles, cross-border meaning-making and mobilization, the websites I studied, and many others, are essentially transnational feminist. The contention however is that they are not theorized as such.

These websites form virtual epistemological communities, repeatedly exploring and analyzing issues of identities, the state, the society, or the “global.” Identities are understood as located within the nation state interfacing with the contemporary “society,” “state,” and “culture.” These identities are individual and collective, resistant and conforming, created and represented from the standpoint of what Spivak terms the new subaltern. The three issues of identity politics, interface with the state and globalization—central to transnational feminisms—are discussed from multiple, often critical perspectives. In terms of identities explored, analyzed and tied to processes of local, global and the transnational, Countercurrents.org presents the widest variety. It presents writings on identities structured in race, class, social capital, sexuality, caste, age, ability, nationality, religion, language, health, location and education, to name a few. There are intersectional analyses of effects and realities of composite identities variously located, although the term “intersectionality” is never used. For the explicitly and proudly

feminist *Ultraviolet*, issues of identities marked by disability, caste, class or queerness (not sexuality) are curiously absent or mentioned in passing.

Manushi which is the website for women and society and has no place for “feminism” or indeed any *ism* (to avoid “label warfare,” as the editor calls it) also remains silent on identities of caste, ability, age or sexuality. Gender, location and class are focused on to carry out and articulate struggles of livelihood. Heteronormativity and the dual gender system uncritically frame most discussions. On *Countercurrents*, critique is leveled towards the contemporary society in India, damaged by colonialism and neo-imperialism and disserved by an impotent state and complicit elite.

Manushi’s level of analysis is nuanced and mindful of multiple simultaneous realities, including access to various levels of the English language. The usual writer in *Manushi* is the upper caste upper class academic-activist, this space of cyberactivism inseparable from the editor or creator of the space, the subject being the lower class urban or rural poor existing on the fringes of the market system, precarious citizens neglected by the state and the new middle class. The intersectional identity of the writer, targeted reader and subject on *Ultraviolet*, on the other hand, is unified into that of the urban, able, young, Indian (sometimes expatriate) woman. On *Countercurrents*, the writer and subject have diffuse, intersectional identities resisting multiple scattered hegemonies, and this space can be accessed in multiple Indian languages. In terms of primary and secondary knowledge creation, *Countercurrents* emerges as tending towards transnational feminism, casting light on unknown voices and silences, engaging with multiple standpoints and unabashedly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist.

These unprecedented spaces of crowd-sourced feminist knowledge creation, or cyberfeminism, although not in the familiar, feminist, first world sense, present and represent interesting cases in feminist epistemology.⁸⁰ The Internet provides a space for performance of citizenship, creation of knowledge and circulation of discourses that remain outside traditional structures and hegemonies, purposively rebellious and fluid. These represent new civil societies that many can access and engage in, yet, like conventional civil societies, they are inaccessible to many, rife with war of positions and dreaming of justice and democracy. Most authors do not admit to being implicated in the same processes and hegemonies that they claim to oppose, not grand claims but paralogical praxis, where each individual becomes a node of information and power, dreaming simultaneously of connection and disconnection mobilization and isolation, individuality and collectivity.

However, the cyberspace is certainly not without its limitations. My personal experience with various feminist cyber-communities sheds some light on the way a virtual campaign works. I recently attempted to raise money and awareness about acid attacks on women (a common form of gender violence in South Asia: women are burned with acid often as a way of “avenging” male pride). I took up the case of Sonali Mukherjee, acid attack victim/survivor whose face and body has been burned beyond recognition. The perpetrators are out on bail, still threatening her to do further damage. They had reportedly burned her in the first place because she tried to stop their sexual harassment. She has received no support from the government or NGOs, feminist or

⁸⁰ “Crowd-sourced” points at the process of crowdsourcing, or using collective knowledge, or bringing together a group of people connected by the new media to create something of value. See Jeffrey Rockwell’s (2012) “Crowdsourcing the Humanities: Social Research and Collaboration” for more.

women's organizations. She made a public statement asserting her right to die (attempt to suicide is a punishable offense in India) because she did not have a future, was robbed of her citizenship and human rights and denied justice.

I received no assistance from *Manushi*, *Blank Noise* or *Ultraviolet*. Two of them did not follow up. The other refused to publish my poem on Sonali as a fund/awareness raising effort because "we are already carrying a poem on acid violence. The readers want variety."⁸¹I received help from two communities "Wishberry.in" and South Asian Women's Caucus (SAW) of the NWSA. The former used a crowd-sourced model of fundraising for Sonali, naming it "Girls Get Together to Help Sonali." They also had a sister organization start a petition to the prime minister demanding stricter laws, and banning of over the counter acid sales. SAW Caucus circulated the story, poems and fundraising information in their listservs. The same cyberspace that provides me and others the mode and space to intervene and act for justice also embodies injustices and instances of uncritically catering to popular consumption (of poems or news stories), partisan identity politics (someone anonymously suggested that Sonali being an upper caste girl, her plight wasn't unjust enough) or just plain indifference.

What can we learn from all this? That in our times of deepening globalization, globalism and transnationalism, an emphasis on workings of the state and nation acquires a new significance, as does participatory politics. The Internet provides a space for such participation for many individuals and groups that have been traditionally excluded from civil societies. Globalization scatters not just hegemonies but also social movements and feminisms. Cyberfeminism might be a way to form alliances and coalitions. Those

⁸¹ Chat and email communication with editor between July 20-23, 2012.

engaging in transnational cyberfeminism are themselves embedded in individual and collective identities that have been shaped by global processes, and hegemonies.

However, so are all of us in academia identifying as transnational feminists. Problems notwithstanding, the Internet does represent a technology that can further the cause of comparison, pedagogies and reciprocity in transnational feminisms.

Perhaps Lisa Nakamura's recommendation for cyberculture studies could serve as a guide. Nakamura studied the curious omission of race and racialization in cyber discourse and exclusion of certain racial and other identities from the cyberspace. On the basis of her studies, she says, "Rather than seeing offline life and life in cyberspace as being two entirely separate spheres, cyberculture studies must examine the 'roots' of one within the other—the ways in which racial gendered and cultural histories and the identities conditioned by them in turn shape the discourses that are audible in and about cyberspace. Only then can the field begin to claim cyberspace as an object of knowledge in a way that 'keeps it real'—that resists co-optation by corporate and cultural forces that would curtail its considerable subversive potential in regard to oppressive notions of racial identity" (Nakamura 2002, 146). Transnational feminism and cyberculture studies could intersect at a point that radically alters the forms of and discussions on gender justice movements.

Chapter 6

On the Possibility and Impossibility of Transnational Feminism

So, the transnational frame does not transcend nations as it moves between them, in the same way that feminist movement cannot transcend history. The importance does not lie in being beyond factors that have material affects on lives, but in interacting with these with responsibility and awareness. It is crucial to honour differences at the very moments where feminism seeks to move across differences. Denying differences to make this distance disappear, or reducing differences so certain subjects become markers of it to make the distance seem more surmountable merely does a disservice to the position of subjects, all of which are emerging within and through differences. -Humaira Saeed (2012, 10)

At this point in the trajectory of interrogating and comparing meanings of transnational feminisms, it becomes important to grapple with what makes this epistemological enterprise just and useful. “Just,” in the sense of social and epistemic justice; useful, not just as academic careers in the global north, or the one-thirds-world— but as a feminist turn or praxis that incorporates the four “I”s of feminist research and knowledge – intersectionality, intersubjectivity, interdisciplinarity and intervention – that I have delineated in my earlier chapters. With that end in mind, in my concluding chapter I will suggest ideal types and gather instances of transnational feminist research that has achieved or has the potential to achieve the necessary goals of social justice and equitable global exchange.

The trend in social theory and social criticism, especially in the ones created by the neo Marxian Frankfurt School that feminist theorists build upon, has been to maintain a relative autonomy of theory from practices. However, unremitting and well-meaning critique continues to feed academic/intellectual performances and production. Shying

away from “solutions,” or operations or answers in a sometimes justifiable poststructural angst/ambit continues to push academic feminism further away from praxis. Instead, “praxis” becomes an object of study, to be deconstructed and analyzed, and is sometimes even collapsed with theorization. Thus, praxis becomes elite academic feminist performance in the US (as evident in publications such as *The Subsistence Perspective or Playing with Fire*) nested in texts on grassroots level activism against broader social forces of capitalism, globalization and neo-colonialism in the non-US, “transnational” terrain. This widens the gap between the various worlds (one-thirds, two thirds) and geo-epistemological spaces (“western” and “non-western”, “global north and south”), even as feminists claim solidarity and collaboration. Transnational feminists mainly claiming and being of South Asian origin, highly visible in U.S. academic feminism complicates the divisions. However, for many of my feminist knowledge worker interviewees from India, feminists located within academia, or U.S. academy, irrespective of their claimed identities and solidarities are deeply embedded in the global production process of imported knowledge and expertise about the “other.”

In my conversation with knowledge workers from India there emerged threads and perspectives that can be termed “critique of critique of...” These feminists “critique” the critical analyses of western feminisms’ critique of broad transnational oppressive processes under labels such as “neoliberal” “neocolonial” or “statist.” These, according to some feminists in India, are critiques from a position of privilege (POP), a leap into post modernity without understanding the continuity and implications of modernity, or just recycled rhetoric that criticizes every state or civil society initiative. Meanwhile, ground

realities require negotiation, messy entanglements and strategizing within neoliberal/neocolonial conditions to continue women's work, livelihoods, citizenship rights and other forms of fragmented agency.

In my previous chapters, transnational feminism has emerged in different forms: as collaboration, as methodology of fieldwork, as feminist utopia, as identity politics of diasporic-feminists-of-color-located-in-the-first-world, as global flow and its own epistemic economy, as inequitable academic division of labor. Many of these forms have been necessitated by feminists' interfacing, intellectually and in other ways, with current pace and scale of globalization. In academic feminism, transnational feminism has transpired as a result of postcolonial, poststructural and postmodern turns. However, in its "treatment" or study of the "other," the subjectivity of the other remains mediated, complicit with the transnational feminist mission(s) of academic feminism. The other remains present as activist and collaborator, often never as the knowledge-maker, author and researcher. Keeping in mind the limitation of these roles within and outside academia, this mediated "voice," this "foreign collaborator," or non-traveling, non-academic partner remains forever re-presented and reproduced. This is problematic, especially in the face of claims of "praxis" on behalf of transnational feminist authors in the U.S., that threaten to take over the only space left to feminists "elsewhere"—the space of activism, intervention and engagement. The current trend in transnational feminist writing has been to posit accounts of activism "elsewhere" as praxis, but also including academic, theoretical, writings in the U.S. as necessarily belonging to the realm of activism and praxis. This mingling and resultant diffusion of U.S. academic

scholarship as praxis further renders other forms of transnational and international feminisms invisible or visible only through mediation and categorization into familiar tracts of theory.

My research shows transnational feminism as a U.S. academic feminist phenomenon, as a “wave” that developed in response to deepening globalization, increase in the feminist diaspora, and a vacuum in feminist epistemology. This vacuum built up as standpoint theory, feminist empiricism and other ways of knowing and justification of knowledge could not fully account for the heterogeneous postcolonial, transborder, and “women-of-color” imaginary and consequent academic production. Academic feminism had to reform itself from within to strip itself of legacies of colonizing ethnography, imperialist modes of representation and reproduction of the “other” and patronizing manner of speaking for the other. In doing this, at least in theory, and within accounts of research projects carried out beyond US borders, the divisions between academia and activism, theory and praxis, self and other dissolved into, as one of my interviewees pointed out, “a delightfully tense post structural messiness” that, as another respondent located in India feels, makes “special research export zones” out of third world spaces. “Other” or “international” subjectivities are couched and coaxed into familiar terms and reproductions, as struggling victims, queer actors, and resistant citizens. Narratives of victimization have given way to narratives of engagement and activism on the part of what Mohanty (1988) delineated as the problematic “third world woman.”

However, transnational feminism is a seductive idea, an idea saturated with politics of possibility, a reactive front to the inevitable forces of corporate capitalism and

neocolonial globalization that is oblivious of, or purposely de-valuing and exploiting, the “natural” environment, women’s and minorities’ labor, knowledge and images. These forces aimed at generating surplus and sticking to the bottom line do not care for the study of humanities, protecting human rights or advancing social science research missions unless they reveal secrets of expansion of markets to still newer territories. Race, gender, class, nationality, age, sexualities become categories of consumers, not intersecting axes of citizenship and identity politics. How can transnational feminism remain resistant and reflexive? How can transnational feminism generate social and cultural criticism and emerge as radical politics of feminist intervention? How can transnational feminism fulfill its original and evolving claims of social justice, and transformation? How can it remain counter-hegemonic and counter-colonial?

To approach answers to the above questions, not merely rhetorically, we must expand our understanding of transnational feminism as a political device and ideology beyond the confines of US academia. Just as the third wave, or the postmodern turn fragmented feminism into feminisms, transnational feminisms need to be understood as a diffuse nebula of feminist interventions, intersecting with varied social movements, located in multiple sites, spheres, nations, spaces and places. It cannot be confined to studies of the diaspora “in here,” or studies of colonially created and designated areas and their people “out there.” What is necessary is a space of convergence, comparison and communication. Current transnational feminist literature, almost all of it produced by US academics, looks at people, places and processes outside of the US, in the manner of anthropology or international and multicultural feminist agendas which have been

critiqued as being homogenizing and colonizing. What are we missing? How can we create transnational feminisms that do not reproduce coloniality; that do not unconsciously inflict epistemic injustice?

On the Issue of Epistemic Privilege and Justice in Transnational Feminist Knowledge-making: CPR Approach

Is there a transnational feminist epistemology? Contemporary feminist epistemology, or feminist epistemologies, represent(s) multiple feminist attempts to “reconfigure the borders between epistemology, political philosophy, ethics and other areas of philosophy as we come to see the interrelationships and inseparability of heretofore disparate issues” (Alcoff & Potter 1993,3). Feminist epistemology is a corpus of theories and philosophies of knowledge that questions foundationalism in knowledge creation and traditional Western epistemology, questions the knower and the coherent epistemic subject, investigates the socio-historical context of knowledge (colonialism, capitalism), turns to issues of identity (of knowers and knowledge-creators), power (in the way knowledge is created and disseminated, exchanged and distorted) and politics (ideologies, institutions, epistemic structures). If transnational feminism as a subfield must maintain relevance and consistency, intellectual honesty and rigor, it is important to think about what such an epistemology means.

I have mentioned earlier that transnational feminism does not represent an epistemological break exactly, but it certainly grows out of the postmodern, postcolonial, poststructural “turns” in feminism. To test the effectiveness of a transnational feminist epistemology, it could be held under the lens of feminist epistemology as a whole, as well

as canonical and contemporary claims made in this field. I have done the latter through interrogating the comparative conditions of feminist knowledge creation in two bordered, heterogeneous spaces that are locked in an (often one sided) transnational feminist conversation. I have also interviewed visible and invisible producers of knowledge to reveal hierarchies and inequities in transnational feminist collaboration. For achieving the former goal, to designate a transnational feminist epistemology, I locate it within some of the broader tenets of feminist epistemology. This “location” of transnational feminism in spaces of discourse and geography is often uncritically “given.” Questioning why a certain space or identity, say “India” or “South Asia” becomes dominant in transnational feminism is rare in prevalent scholarship. Questioning transnational feminism’s relevance to feminist knowledge-making and achieving social justice goals is rarer. My interviewees in India feel that postmodern reluctance to utter anything specific for the fear of universalization and homogenization often becomes a front for “anything goes” as long as it has an element of the international, an analysis of the “foreign,” or the support of diasporic women-of-color feminists and native informants. Discourses seem to endlessly embody repetitive claims couched in buzzwords (such as reflexivity, collaboration, activism etc.) without actual follow up.

Strong objectivity means looking critically at the conventional, positivist notion of objectivity that claims and demands distance from the researcher and the researched, implying that there is no value judgment, no political desire, no individual or group bias, subjectivity, personal history or idiosyncratic practices in the research process. Feminists have shown how this epistemological claim, especially in scientific research is false, akin

to a “god trick” (Haraway 1988). Strong objectivity can, through admission and examination of researcher’s self-interests and positionality, actually achieve objectivity, consistency and rigor in research. I argue that the notions of strong objectivity and situated knowledge, *when operationalized*, and not merely mentioned in passing or paid lip service to, can create a useful transnational feminist epistemology because they incorporate accountability and the practice of backing up frameworks and guidelines with action. Strong objectivity can be useful to subjects AND objects of knowledge, as that distinction blurs and it is understood that both the researcher and researched are situated, embedded social and historical actors.

Harding (1993) states that conventional objectivism, aimed at “value-free” research turns away from the task of critically identifying broad historical social desires, interests and values that shape the agendas, contents and results of the sciences as much as they shape the rest of human affairs. She names reflexivity as a resource for strong objectivity. She also differentiates between subjects of conventional knowledge and subjects of feminist standpoint enquiry. The latter subjects: are embodied and visible, are not fundamentally different from objects of knowledge. They produce communal/cultural and not detached individual knowledge, are multiple, heterogeneous, and contradictory/incoherent as opposed to unitary, homogeneous and coherent empirical epistemological subjects. Harding (1993, 69) argues that objectivity per se does not stand in the way of feminism and feminist knowledge-making, but a weak notion of objectivity does. “Strong objectivity requires what we can think of as strong reflexivity”.

However, current transnational feminist texts are saturated with accounts of self-reflexivity which often seem to leave out the context, real and material conditions of knowledge creation. They leave out the questions of politics of collaboration, blur out hierarchies and borders and instead seem to discuss researchers' political ideology, thoughts and feelings on the research process and goals of social justice without suggesting how such goals might be reached. Intersectional accounts of researchers' own positions of privilege too, are left out. In several transnational feminist publications, expatriate authors have questioned U.S. academy's treatment of them, or U.S. society's assumptions about their nationality and culture, and questions about the purpose of their travel. These authors in textual playfulness have expressed their exasperation, and sometimes justified their postcolonial "presence" and displacement. I am not suggesting that they are bound to explain themselves. But when they bring in the "personal," when they trace their travels back and forth, their hybridity and displacement, their express attempts to be self-reflexive, how can they leave out the enabling or disabling conditions that positioned them in the role of transnational feminist knowledge creators in US academia? This is a question that has surprised me, my students and my interviewees in India.

Knowledge creation, as a production process, as "labor," could be made transparent in transnational feminism. Labor, as an inherent part of transnational collaboration provided by "insiders", "informants," "translators" and "mediators" located in and belonging to the third world sites of research, need to be located within a framework of epistemological community. Similarly, the social and other forms of

capital, of the researchers or collaborators located in and belonging to the global north, despite their migrant and transmigrant statuses could perhaps be brought into the discussion.

Surprisingly, in most transnational feminist texts the researchers in the global north give a detailed account of their labor (their writing, coordinating and collaborating, traveling, dealing with red tape and other statist restrictions) and their subjects' and collaborators' social capital (their knowledge, language, access to sites, unique standpoints). In this paradox, the problematic nature of knowledge imported for a western audience remains shrouded and couched in idealistic terms. I argue for a more materialistic account of both the content and production of knowledge. Neglecting the political economy of transnational ethnographic knowledge production will mask the tense, antagonistic nature of transnational research collaborations.

Feminist epistemological critique has usually been directed, for reasons grounded firmly in history, at the natural sciences. Several feminists have critically engaged with, repaired and reclaimed science and scientific principles. They have argued that the superiority claimed by scientific knowledge is based on principles which are in reality not operationalized and practiced (Longino 1993, Harding 1993, 2004). Science is essentially "practice" or "consensus" reached by the scientific community, which includes or excludes knowledge-makers and sets standards for validation. Feminist treatment of women as subjects and producers of knowledge aligns with the Marxist notion of epistemic privilege of the proletariat, who also are subject to epistemic injustice by those that do not recognize such privilege. I would like to draw a parallel here with the

framework of Marxist production relations and class conflict with the current production process of transnational feminist scholarship. Here, women “elsewhere” are recognized and understood as bearers of unique and important standpoints, politics and experiential knowledge. However, the epistemic injustice, perhaps not purposely directed at them but a consequence of the way corporate western academia is organized, ends up devaluing their work. They remain cheap laborers of research, “non-theoretical,” non-academic partners who are glorified fieldworkers. They create information about familiar subjects, and about their selves, information that is raw material for transnational feminist analysis and examination.

This gives rise too, to the question whether authorship of theory, publication credit, and other academic validation and visibility is desirable to knowledge creators elsewhere. My interviewees in India were evenly split on the question. Thirteen of them, mostly researchers and workers in research centers located in and operating from extra-academic settings, were less interested in credit and more in remunerations and funding flow that allows some autonomy from government funding but often means adhering to a western feminist academic agenda. They frequently collaborate in research projects on topics that are their forte and exercise some agency in the way they perform their part of the collaboration. Thirteen knowledge workers, mostly located in academia, deplored the way their work is used as raw material, as “data,” as building materials for western feminist scholarship. They are interested in following up what becomes of their work, how much of their analysis and insights are taken into account.

These insights often refute the usual over-theorized critique of development, democracy and (in)dependence by western feminists, or transmigrant feminists who claim multinational expertise by virtue of travel and displacement. However, the counter critiques circulate as discourses within the global south, unable to reach or gain visibility in the global north on account of not being published or academically sanctioned. To many feminists in India, this exclusion and invisibility is akin to women's and marginal groups' exclusion from mainstream science and scientific communities, which are insular, locked into systems of domination and claiming expertise of and usefulness for the lives of the marginalized "masses." Transnational feminism cannot and should not, especially in the face of its own claims of global solidarity and goals of social justice, be treating women elsewhere as objects of study while claiming to restore their epistemic agency.

Feminisms in India have a tense relationship with theory. Newer modes of subaltern and *Dalit* feminism arising after the political crises of the late 1970s, however, pushed for grounded theory and frameworks that resisted translation of women's and other marginalized groups' work into familiar western, feminist/theoretical schema. This move, resulted in anxiety on the part of sociologists in India (sociology is often considered the basis and home of academic feminism in India) about "feminification of theory." This phenomenon, explained by several sociologists, "draws attention to the fact that the postmodern insistence of reading everything as text finds its fullest efflorescence in the domain of feminist studies. Regardless of gender, the postmodern credo encourages partisanship towards contemporary feminist scholarship and a concomitant downgrading

of both theory and conceptual and disciplinary rigour” (Gupta 1995, 620). Thus, dabbling in theory by feminists is looked upon as self-indulgent, unscholarly behavior by mainstream academia, and self-indulgent, non-activist behavior by the grassroots level movements. Indian feminisms’ close entanglement with social movements as well as mainstream academia, electoral politics and the state puts theory and theorization in a precarious position.

Still, within *Dalit* feminism, there is a strong discourse on the language question, which is often ignored by transnational feminist collaborative projects that showcase Dalit women’s work and movement. Translation is always a contentious issue in doing any kind of transnational research, an issue taken up by formal academic organizations such as the IRB, or published feminist scholarship on epistemology, methodology and representation. There is a vast wealth of feminist scholarship published in English in India, written by scholars working and residing in India, within and outside the academia that never makes it to the citations/bibliography pages of transnational feminist scholarship in the U.S.

Although the postmodern, poststructural and linguistic turns in feminist scholarship are equally contentious in India, they are nonetheless treated as frameworks that can aid social justice. “The ‘language question’ in Dalit imagination conceived as a problem for reimagining the content and methods of language opens up the easy equation between region and language; calling for reflections on ‘region’ in sociological practice. Such reflections carry the possibility of opening up new conversations and comparative frameworks across different locations and imaginaries—social, geographical, institutional

and epistemic” (Rege 2011, 232). Several of my interviewees have argued that abandonment of theory is dangerous and that feminist epistemology must engage in the historical, political, and theoretical process of constituting female subjecthood, of restoring to women their rightful place as makers and subjects of knowledge. However US transnational feminists do not seem to treat “other” women’s perspectives as primary and constitutive, or theoretical. These perspectives often take the form of narrating life experiences that fit the mold of a research project, or non-theoretical, stream of consciousness collective writing.⁸²

The need for theory and guidelines of/for collaboration are articulated in very few transnational feminist texts, overshadowed by the need for open ended-ness, for poststructural instabilities. In 2006, Koni Benson and Richa Nagar admit that, “there is a small but growing literature that details the collaborative process, but even here researchers rarely talk about creating methodologies or theories of collaboration. As beliefs that guide behavior, theories can actively create and advance participatory methodologies while resisting sweeping deployments of the term collaboration, and creating more space for the hitherto under legitimized, underfunded, and under analyzed collaborative practices.” Subsequent and current transnational feminist texts, including

⁸² Examples are the articles and research reports that appear in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, Richa Nagar’s *Playing with Fire*, or Elora Chowdhury’s *Transnationalism Reversed*. While many feminists in India believe in and practice the Gramscian notion of intellectualism where every socially engaged actor is an organic intellectual with individual epistemologies, their intellectuality is not considered publishable or importable. These intellectuals would much rather choose oppositional collective consciousness that is capable of making small, contingent changes locally than be visible as transnational feminist theorists. However, the issue here is how their intellectual/activist endeavors are utilized in U.S. transnational feminism in a manner that seems to keep the core-periphery logic of world systems intact. Discourses, movement texts and narratives keep flowing from the peripheries to U.S. academia to be manufactured as recorded, organized knowledge products that can act as social capital for the producers. These producers, diasporic and other feminists in case of transnational feminism, do not acknowledge or intervene to change the gaping divides between unequal worlds and nations.

Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis, suggest that “collaboration is not merely a set of concrete strategies or models with ethical dilemmas and conceptual difficulties that must be addressed and attended to. On the contrary collaboration itself poses a theoretical challenge to and potential for rethinking transnational feminist frameworks by creating new spaces for political and intellectual initiatives beyond disciplinary borders, academic/artistic/activist divides and north/south dichotomies.” What is left out here, in this statement of claims of impossibility of strategies and new spaces is the reality of who organizes these “new spaces,” who takes them over and who is usually the academic, the activist and the artist. The academic, my research and recollection of transnational feminist events and texts shows to be almost always one deeply embedded in western academia. The activist is usually an entity, individual or group from the global south. The artist, if located in the global south is usually a creative resistor, an object of ethnography and analysis. If located in the global north, they are often enacting world crises through their art form to a western audience, playing a mediating, creative and critical role whose accounts/first person narratives become transnational feminist scholarship.⁸³

The disappearance of the question of “nation” in transnational feminism, except as spaces of transnational feminist research, robs transnational feminist epistemology of an important analytical category. This retreat from the concept of “nation” was evident in the way feminists that I talked to in the U.S. resisted my idea of comparing perspectives from India and the U.S. These are messy boundaries, not exactly a good contrast, they

⁸³ See Tinsley, Chatterjea, Wilcox and Gibney’s essay titled “So Much to Remind Us We Are Dancing on Other People’s Blood: Moving Towards Artistic Excellence, Moving from Silence to Speech, Moving in Water, with Ananya Dance Theater, in A Swarr and R Nagar’s (eds) *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, for an example of how such art is performed and perceived.

said. Too many exchanges and spillages. However, to my feminist respondents in India, these boundaries were very real and significant. Look at the way scholarship and discourses travel one way, they said. Look at who travels where to do ethnographic research. Spot on. In spite of postcolonial displacements and de-centering, feminist discourse in India still remains “case studies,” and never canonical or original texts to be considered as an integral part of feminist epistemology. Without going into the practical problem of including *everything from everywhere* in curricula and citations, I’d like to point out that transnational feminist discourse claims “equal partnership” in research and scholarship while simultaneously perpetuating the “theory-here-activism-there” dichotomy and effacement of “other” perspectives.

To go back to my original question, is there a transnational feminist epistemology? My research shows that there is not, but that there can be. So far, what we have is a movement towards and desire for ethical, accountable, non-hierarchical transnational feminist scholarship that takes one or more nation as a site of feminist research. These sites are usually non-U.S. spaces, where women’s issues, movements and resistances tied deeply to such global and local processes are studied by U.S. scholars to understand varieties of gender roles and variance of gender performances. The transnational “gender” question is placed in broader, familiar frameworks in U.S. feminist and social studies. These frameworks are neoliberalism and neocolonialism, used to study new social movements often organized around such fall outs of pervasive capitalist globalization as environmental degradation, bio-piracy, labor exploitation and cultural imperialism. Collaborative and collective knowledge emerges as central to this

epistemology without the methods and modalities worked out. Researchers' self-reflexivity also emerges as central to transnational feminist writing, but often this reflexivity amounts to selective disclosure of the purpose, capacities and capital of research. Accountability is a notion often grappled with within U.S. and Indian academic feminism (John 2008, Levin 2007) as well as transnational feminisms (Swarr and Nagar 2010, Mohanty 2003). The question remains, can we generate and delineate transnational feminist epistemological principles? Can we suggest *methods* in the face of and based on methodologies generated in the field?

Dalmiya and Alcoff (1993) conclude that epistemology needs to incorporate “accounts of knowing how” and “experiential knowledge” along with propositional knowledge. This argument is close to Babbit's (1993) notion of a “descriptive epistemology” that understands the process of knowing, along with a normative epistemology that incorporates objectivity and morality. Understanding and explaining the goals and process of knowing, I argue, is important in transnational feminist epistemology. Unless traveling feminist authors are held to the same standards of strong objectivity that are reserved in feminist epistemology for scientists, old white men, and imperialist anthropologists, the feminist knowledge enterprise might begin to look dishonest, and from my interviews with subjects and objects of knowledge, with informants and collaborators in India, it definitely does.

How can transnational feminism remain honest and counter hegemonic? Critical discourse analysis of my interview data reveals three critical modes of operation, three practices that might ensure honesty and justice in this form of feminist knowledge

making. These three elements are comparisons, pedagogies and reciprocities (CPR).

Using the CPR model will hopefully strengthen and ground transnational feminist epistemology within interventions that integrate community and university, theory and praxis, academia and activism. Here's how:

Comparison: Modes, Methods and Necessity. Multisite, multi-case comparisons ensure that transnational feminist research is not merely another modality of anthropology which is and can be a “hegemonic mode of discursive colonization of third world women (Mohanty 2003, 57).” Studying the “other,” or the “third world woman” even in terms of resistance and not oppression as is the current trend in transnational feminist discourse generated in the U.S. Without a comparative context that firmly grounds the purpose of the research is still seems to be an exercise in anthropologizing.⁸⁴ True, these accounts, narratives and analyses of women's movements elsewhere break out of the obviously patronizing model of the oppressed third world women “under western eyes,” as Mohanty pointed out. These analyses often position third world women as oppressed, not as much by local patriarchies (a term that has become clichéd in western feminist discourse, especially after the second wave, and the invention and circulation of the intersectionality framework) and inequitable religious/social/traditional structures, but by global production processes and gendered/spatial division of labor. The notion of transnational as “between” or “across” nations continues to catalog struggles and oppressions located in a single site, justifying such ethnography by tying the studied processes to globalization, capitalism and cultural imperialism. There are also discussions

⁸⁴ This trend is manifested in, as Mohanty pointed out, in books published under Zed Press' “Women in the Third World Series,” but also more recently in the syllabi I analyzed and some textbooks that focus on transnational or global feminism.

of global feminist alliances which are often mediated by problematic donor, intergovernmental and border protection agencies. Thus the mode to “trans” the national is often about using third world women as an exploited object of global capitalism. There is rarely if ever a study that compares differences and similarities of struggle between south and south, north and north or north and south. Comparisons are deemed problematic, because they tend to reify differences and binaries that transnational feminists are eager to transcend.

This focus on migrant or international laborers or sites of struggle of “other” or diasporic women, while providing an endless supply of ethnographic sites for transnational feminist research, reaches a dead end when discussing the implications of such a research project for feminisms. There is little disagreement in the field about women’s invisible labor, now globalized. There is a lot of appreciation of women’s spirited struggles against global forces. However, without tying these processes to feminism, without providing a feminist rationale for such research that ties in cases from a single country or space to a multiplicity of spaces, without tying in the stories of struggles in the third worlds with those present and similar in the first, these stories merely serve an anthropological purpose, to learn more about the “other.” To learn more, to gain expertise, to exercise authority, to expand authorship.

However, anthropology too, especially social/symbolic anthropology embodied in the works of Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, embraced comparative research as a way to understand cultures and learn from them; to exorcise ethnocentrism and reformulate assumptions about the “other.” True these anthropologists have been the subject of

feminist critique, but there is something to be said for comparative models of qualitative and quantitative research that try to understand correlations, commonalities and critical combinations. The aim of such comparison is not generalizability or homogenization, neither is it reification of difference. But there is a disturbing trend within US transnational feminism where differences between the researcher and the researched and between nations (often by not taking them as a category of analysis, or citing global flow, neo-colonialisms and porous borders as a reason to not accord them significance) are effaced. Without a nation there is no cross-national comparison; without acknowledging the variations of privilege, positionality and social capital within the researcher and the researched, there is a false sense of feminist solidarity and sisterhood. Without recognizing differences and contrasts due to fear of colonial ethnocentrism/cultural relativism, there is nothing to compare.

Sherene Razack (2000, 41) states in simple language differential access and privilege of geo-epistemological spaces: differences that a fear of comparison can obscure. She states,

There is an important difference in material privilege between an intellectual based in the North and one based in the South. On a seemingly mundane but crucial level, those of us in the North enjoy considerable access to a wide range of intellectuals, to books and to computers. The information flows these enable feed our own production and we can circulate our ideas both in the North and the South more quickly as result. Those of us originally from the South but based in the North can play a unique role in the exercising of this overall material privilege and the domination it buys.

She goes on to discuss what it means to be a scholar from the global south in the global north, and how it does not mean assuming a “white subject position” and how such

scholars are regulated, an issue discussed by scholars such as Trinh Minh-Ha. However, her simple, honest statement of privilege, and the nature of academic work as production with a material basis is something often obscured in transnational feminist literature. Although written twelve years ago, the privileges Razack mentions are still very much intact and relevant despite greater technology integration and increased travel and discursive exchange between the north and the south. Comparison thus can become an important methodological as well as epistemological issue.

A lack of critical, cross national comparison often lessens the value of transnational feminist knowledge creation—in terms of interventions and strategies, in terms of moving the field forward and in terms of creating research that recognizes and incorporates the four “I”s of feminism. Feminist scholars have especially emphasized the need for a comparative framework for producing intersectional work (Dill and Kohlman 2012, Shields 2008). A critical re-visioning of “difference” can lead away from the hierarchical analyses of the difference/similarity approaches in academic feminism and emphasize interrelations and ties between global processes of epistemic production, distribution and consumption.

Humaira Saeed, in her recent essay titled “Moving Feminism: How to ‘Trans’ the National?,” which draws from the ‘Transnational Feminisms’ conference organized by her and Clare Tebbutt at the University of Manchester in December 2009, makes two very important points about the issue of differences within and dynamics of transnational feminisms.

One response here is to engage with these differences as opportunities to learn and to engage. This is akin to Mohanty’s notion of solidarity, the

ethical way of crossing borders, where the difference born of distinct locations is honoured but does not become a reason for avoiding coalition work across difference. Listening with humility to contexts of difference becomes the beginning of an ethical engagement. So, the transnational frame does not transcend nations as it moves between them, in the same way that feminist movement cannot transcend history. The importance does not lie in being beyond factors that have material affects on lives, but in interacting with these with responsibility and awareness. It is crucial to honour differences at the very moments where feminism seeks to move across differences. Denying differences to make this distance disappear, or reducing differences so certain subjects become markers of it to make the distance seem more surmountable merely does a disservice to the position of subjects, all of which are emerging within and through differences. There are multiple local contexts which make up the global. The desire for connections between these locales that can fuel the global sisterhood can create a focus on a 'sameness' that will always be a construction and always be reductive unless the specifics of each locale are adequately taken into account (Saeed 2012, 10).

Differences and specificities, while risking the danger of reinforcing binaries (us/them, self/other, here/there), also carry the potential to further knowledge that leads to unexpected forms of intervention, uneasy integration and mobilizations to resist oppressive social forces that cut through differences.

Understanding differences and variations is a guard against sweeping generalizations and monolithic categories, forced solidarities and assumptions of sisterhood. Critical comparisons or a method of presenting experiences "side by side," such as those utilized in Kumkum Bhavnani's documentary, "The Shape of Water," or the Viva! Project expands transnational feminist knowledge, not just substantively, by adding more information, but methodologically, by extending and opening up newer, nuanced categories of analysis. Comparison helps the cause of critical feminist geography, feminist engagement with international relations and politics. Comparison and cross-national projects help sustain a

global connectivity discourse that recognizes reciprocity and marginalization, not only within women's roles of invisible producers but also as consumers, not women as passive victims but also as participants in everyday acts of criticality and resistance. Comparative ethnography, comparative theoretical perspectives and methodologies drawn from and directed everywhere disrupt the often one way global flow of knowledge and discourses and disrupt the core-periphery model that is still silently operational in transnational feminist research. Recognition and comparison of experiences and positionalities is the first step of disruption, along with critical attention to who is doing the job of comparative analysis, located where, using what framework.

Establishing a methodology and ethical methods of comparison will bring questions of nation, production and consumption of discourses to the forefront of transnational feminism. Comparison can take the form of face to face or online conversations with feminists across boundaries that compare notes on everyday experiences and knowledge-making, resistances to and from the state and markets. Comparison can take the form of understanding oppression and interventions in the light and frameworks developed in multiple geo-epistemological spaces, not just the global north. Comparison would mean research within the global south on issues within and without and their connections, and ethnographic travel should have multiple directionality.

Taking a comparative approach also addresses a very important question that often arises in classrooms and training sessions in the US and India, while dealing with

transnational/international/global/multicultural/third world feminisms: “Why should we care about how feminists organize in space X (often located in the global south)?” Or a related question, generated from the same curiosity about purpose: “Why do we need to learn about struggles occurring in space X from the perspective of a writer located in Space Y?” In the following section on “pedagogies” I deal with what these questions mean and how transnational feminist epistemology can translate into and transform feminist pedagogies.

Pedagogies: Potential for Micro Politics. Feminist pedagogy is often understood as a resistance (and sometimes reactionary and in need of institutional disciplining), reformation and reclamation project (Patai and Koertge 2003, Kaufman and Lewis 2012, Zimmerman 2002). Locating feminist movement within ‘the ideological state apparatus’ of the university gave rise to the new interdiscipline of Women’s Studies that evolved in literature and history departments in the US and in sociology and anthropology departments in India. In the latter space a lot of critical and radical teaching, training and learning take place in the de-centralized research and documentation centers whose workings I explain in chapter 2.

Transnational feminist authors analyze curricula and teaching practices to understand the problems of representation and re-presentation or repeated presentation of third world women as victimized, passive and seeking development and progress (Mohanty 1988, Spivak 1993, Narayan 1997). There is discussion of the crucial omission of third world or one-third world’s experiences

of marginality within what is spatially and historically designated as the first world within women's studies curricula (Alexander and Mohanty 2010).

Curricula and classroom conversations emerge as a crucial site of epistemic justice and radical transnational feminist intervention.

The classroom often is the first point of contact with the "international" or "transnational" focus on gender issues for hundreds and thousands of women's studies students in the U.S. every semester. In India, within women studies classrooms in universities, the transnationalization of curricula takes the form of learning about third world and diaspora from the perspective of scholars located and working in western academe. In the curricula of core courses, experiences and analyses of womanhood, feminist theory, and methodology present first world entities as the normalized feminist subject, as the "woman," as the thinker, rights-endowed citizen, radical actor and intellectual agent. Reading and discussing movement texts, non-mainstream literature, and other non-conventional knowledge products, often not in English, happen usually in seminars and meetings and training sessions organized in extra academic, extra-organized-non-profit-sector settings. Since transnational feminism is largely a US academic feminist construction, I want to emphasize the internationalized curriculum and classroom as spaces of national hegemony. Moallem (2006, 333) aptly sums up this curricular crisis as follows:

For a number of women's studies programs, internationalization is yet another "add-and-stir" moment, an evolution, which has followed the prior adding of "women of color" to mainstream women's studies curricula. This framework has maintained the nationalist focus of women's studies without

challenging or changing it. The mainstream assumption about internationalization is that it is the spread of knowledge that is produced in the West and consumed in various parts of the world. The genealogy of such views of internationalization along with notions of universalism are inseparable from the project of colonial modernity in its desire not only to know about "the state of the populations," in Foucauldian terms in order to discipline them, but also to spread the values of a rational model of knowledge production in its venture of modernizing, civilizing, and developing the traditional, the uncivilized, and the under developed.

Tiptoeing around the utopian, unpractical claims of transformative feminist pedagogies including liberatory classrooms and diversity ideals that Kitch (2000, 102-3) problematizes, I suggest that pedagogical interventions might be a feasible way of "doing" transnational feminism and attempting epistemic justice. Kitch (2000, 93) suggests that we look for alternative approaches to academic feminism, "rooted in realism, for the establishment of a principled yet flexible, dynamic, and complex framework of feminist thought." Transnational feminism can be such an approach, keeping in mind the genesis of its theories and methodology through critical evaluation of feminist pedagogies and the representation of "third world women" not just in published texts but classroom interactions. It might be worthwhile however to disrupt some discourses that circulate under the rubric of "transnational" or "international" in U.S. women's studies classrooms.

What does it mean to talk about the worlds "here" and "elsewhere" in terms of disconnections and exchange, power dynamics and negotiations? How can one teach about feminist movements, migration patterns, the retreating welfare state and deepening capitalism worldwide, and its effect on women and other disadvantaged groups from transnational feminist perspectives? Can the

classroom be envisioned as a space for de-colonizing knowledge and creating multiplier effects, however small, of operational justice, global awareness and micro-politics that can transform day-to-day practices?

I believe that the answer to that final question is “yes” and I propose the following strategies to deal with the transnational question in feminist pedagogy. First, space and geography, in terms of global organization into spaces, regions, power blocs and geopolitics, must be historicized and emphasized. Frequently, anything that is global or international or transnational erases the nation or nationality of the US as the normalized watchtower from which people look outside to understand the global. There is frequently productive confusion between notions of global north and south, or western and nonwestern in classrooms. An overview (if a detailed discussion is not possible) of the history of nations and states being studied, how they came into nationhood, how they exercise their statehood, what their relationship is to contemporary global conflicts and in case of non U.S. nations, ties connections and interdependencies to the U.S. should be given. My study of 38 undergraduate syllabi of introductory courses from 34 universities and colleges in the U.S. that teach about the “global” and “transnational” in women’s studies shows that over two thirds of these syllabi always represent third world issues as global or international. This notion of the distant problem-ridden global space elsewhere erases U.S.’ position within global systems and presents various regions and continents (“Africa” “Middle-East,” or “Latin America”) as conflicted spaces existing in an historical and political

vacuum, their internal affairs (often social injustices) forming objects of study, their international relations ignored. Historically constituted subjects transform within classrooms, and within textbooks, into the victim or the terrorist.

Second, experiences of racialization, disenfranchisement and roadblocks to political and sexual citizenship of various minority groups within first world spaces such as the U.S. need to be emphasized, to not create an illusion that all is well here; or that the world needs to learn from and be protected by the U.S. in matters of social justice and human rights but to make students aware of the varied forms of violence that has historically existed in this nation. Andrea Smith (2005), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Ella Shohat (2006) and several other feminists of color who focus on such violence do not usually feature in syllabi on transnational feminism. The classroom is a space of formulating citizenship practices, resistances and complicities. The “we are all right” feel-good experienced by many students in the face of learning about human rights abuses “elsewhere” quietly manufactures support for US imperialism in the guise of humanitarianism and rescue.

Third, recognizing reciprocity and exchange is essential to transnational feminist pedagogy. Analysis of globalization in the class, while mindful of the deepened pace and scale of globalization in the last five decades, should map globalization historically, taking into account experiences of colonization and slavery, trade routes and traveling historians. Teaching about the global and the transnational must take into account the exchange of local meanings and

experience vis-à-vis the global, the immediacy of the accelerated back and forth nature of discourse generation and the real and symbolic conditions of technological and epistemological production. The embeddedness of the students and the instructor in broader processes of capitalism and global systems must be tied to their local, everyday experiences of commodity/cultural consumption and reproduction. The problematic hierarchy of nations, regions and languages must be brought into question.

Texts studied in classrooms on transnational feminisms are almost always written by South Asian writers on South Asian (including diasporic) affairs. This trend must be pointed out (often curious students point it out) and grappled with. In all practicality, reciprocal exchange needs an overhaul of the logic of the market and world systems that bring international and transnational publications into the U.S. as teaching and research materials, as complementary pedagogical and epistemological sources. The chain of U.S. authors speaking of the U.S. and the world, and of in between transnational spaces must be disrupted, and I say this with the full recognition that not all U.S. (transnational) feminist scholarship is homogeneous. But there seems to be no sense of exchange or collaboration between cross-border transnational feminists on pedagogy, based on a review of prevalent transnational feminist scholarship. For example, all of Mohanty's (2003, 2010) effective analyses on the syllabi or university/classroom practices focus on U.S. universities, adding significantly to the conversation on transnational feminisms. A collaborative, comparative project that takes into account varied

pedagogies and curricula from a number of geo-epistemological spaces might be very helpful to further the conversation.

Alexander and Mohanty (2010, 41) aver: “What might a map of a radical, non-normative transnational feminist solidarity pedagogy that is attentive to genealogies and spatializations of power across multiple borders look like? Clearly syllabi are crucial spaces for thinking and reconfiguring knowledge, spatial practices and for respatializing power.” Discussion of what constitutes transnational feminism and who are its re-imagined subjects needs to enter the larger discussion of transnational feminist collaboration to make the field more robust and relevant.

There are at present three undergraduate introductory level women’s/gender studies textbooks likely to be used at the undergraduate level in U.S. classrooms that have “transnational” in their titles. These are: *An Introduction to Women’s Studies: Gender in a Transnational World* (Grewal & Kaplan: 2002/2005, first and second editions); *Global Gender Research: Transnational Perspectives* (Bose & Kim: 2009); and *Women Worldwide: Transnational Feminist Perspectives on Women*. (Lee & Shaw: 2011). Grewal and Kaplan apply their “collaborative consciousness” in their editorship of their textbook and move beyond the usual discussion of popular culture, women’s health and work in undergraduate classrooms to include issues of citizenship, empire, human displacement and food production/consumption. The author list is diverse, in terms of focus, location, generation and intersectional identities. Kim

& Bose's collection represents more collaborative research through multiple authorships and the organization of content by regions (Africa, Asia and the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe). The focus of this book is unique in that it brings forth a selection of research being done on gender in those areas. This represents a local focus with an eye on the global, where the local is being framed in terms of the global and globalization. Lee and Shaw's textbook is perhaps the first in its genre to use the words "transnational" and "feminist" together in the book title. It also has a section on transnational feminisms. The other sections represent conventional and relevant women's studies focus areas, such as sexualities, violence, families, war and peace and economy, framed in a global or transnational context. However "global" still largely excludes the global north as the field or gaze of research. These anthologies present more nuanced perspectives on "global" or "third world" women, as compared to earlier textbooks such as Janet Momsen's *Gender and Development* or Beverly Lindsay's (edited, 1980) *Comparative Perspectives of Third World Women*. Most textbooks and introductory women's studies classes still focus on information where... "a comparison between western feminist self-presentation and Western feminist re-presentation of women in the third world yields significant results. Universal images of "the third world woman" (the veiled woman, chaste virgin, etc.), images constructed from adding the 'third world difference' to 'sexual difference' are predicated upon (and hence obviously bring into sharper focus) assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated, and

having control over their own lives” (Mohanty 2003, 42). Considering the volume of students who take women’s studies courses at the undergraduate level by choice and due to institutional (general education or diversity) imperatives, how the “transnational” is being represented in classrooms, especially at the point of first contact with any kind of women’s studies or feminist perspective, has far reaching implications.

Fourth, questions from undergraduate students, questions often sincere such as “Why is this important for me to learn?” “Why do ‘they,’ the ‘others,’ think/know/do that?” “Why is the third world so corrupt/poor/unjust?” “How can I help?” should be dealt with compassionately and without condescension.

Despite Audre Lorde’s concern with the problematic exasperation of educating the dominant/majority group about the minorities’ differences, such education must go on, especially considering current local, regional and global interdependencies. This is important because ignorance is one of the most potent assumptions and reassurance of the current politico-economic-legal systems that strip citizens of their basic rights. Only education can counter ignorance and only creative, radical, integrative pedagogy can transform education. In case of transnational feminism, instructors often have to work harder to provide contexts— historical, economic and intellectual.

No discussion on current forms and effects of globalization can leave out stories of globalization centuries back that sailed expedition ships, allowed capitalism to spread and rule like a state and trafficked free labor on whose backs

the new worlds got wealthy. One cannot leave out stories of the spread of religion and technology, texts and taxes. One cannot simply start from the present day where previously colonized, economically drained, arbitrarily created “third world countries” swimming in debt are forced to “open themselves” to capitalism and free trade, which makes their existing inequities deeper and more permanent. Teaching transnational feminist theory without history or transnational feminist narratives without epistemological and other “backstories” would be akin to teaching co-ordinate geometry without providing knowledge of algebra. If students have partial knowledge from other classes they have taken on history and geography and anthropology, about the “other” the “outside,” these must be drawn on and connected to transnational feminist lessons on women worldwide, or international feminist activism. The “other” and “self” must be connected, the dialectics of “inside” and “outside” made clear. Transnational feminism cannot be an honest field or framework if reciprocity reigns at the rhetorical level.

The Necessity of Reciprocity. The dictionary meaning of reciprocity is “the quality or state of being reciprocal: mutual dependence, action, or influence.”⁸⁵

Transnational feminists often stress reciprocity or mutuality as central to their epistemology and a basis for solidarity (Mohanty 2003, Sangtin Writers 2006, Chowdhury 2011). In order for there to be a transnational feminist community, as a stake holder in a global civil society, or solidarity between feminists and other resistance communities around the world, there need to be common interests, common goals, common language (not always necessarily or possibly

⁸⁵ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reciprocity>

“linguistic”) articulated democratically. Such solidarity cannot and must not be based on a division of labor that privileges some as knowledge makers, coders, analyzers and authors while designating other groups and individuals as objects of knowledge (exercising agency or being dominated, usually simultaneously) whose actions are forever under the bell jar, being studied and theorized upon. While sociologists such as Émile Durkheim would argue that this division of labor is what creates “organic” solidarity in complex, differentiated societies, creating productive interdependencies, being forever cast in the role of “author” and “activist” can become limiting, especially when the author continues to write about the activist and to claim an activist/praxis position through that authorship and authority. The activist however, in case of my research, as someone located in India, can never claim authority or authorship of their own praxis, their own worldviews, their own movements.

In my interviews with transnational feminists in based in the United States and India, the word “organic,” and “solidarity” achieved the status of a leitmotif. Not in the sense of “organic solidarity” as Emile Durkheim theorized on, but as organic processes of writing and knowledge creation, collaboration and coalition. Several authors and academics, in India and the U.S. considered the non-academic participants as “...valuable. They make our work possible. And of course they have authority, they have all the knowledge, of their politics, their anti-capitalist, anticolonial struggles, their, you know, histories.”⁸⁶ Yes, I know. But I also wanted to know about the implications of divorcing authorship from the

⁸⁶ R21, 2011; R8, 2011.

experiential authority. The replies were often evasive. The common themes were: academic writing is not the *only* feminist achievement; activist writing is present and has its place; “activists are always given credit.”⁸⁷

Perhaps. In *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* Richa Nagar places herself in a cohort of collaborators, named as co-authors in “Still Playing with Fire.” In other articles of this anthology, collaborators from the global south are acknowledged and deemed indispensable to transnational feminism. However their intellectual contribution remains unclear, solidifying transnational feminist division of labor and geographically and socio-economically separated divisions of authority. Under the current conditions of transnational feminism, reciprocal exchange of discourse, of theories, of texts is desirable. Simply put, as an interviewee points out, “the textual domination of the global north must be disrupted⁸⁸.”

How can this be done? Feminists texts created in the global south rarely ever find their way to transnational feminist course curricula in the global north. Such texts need to be introduced, taught, analyzed. This always will remain the problem of Anglophonic domination but even texts produced in English remain invisible. My conversations with feminist academics in the global south reveal that non-university academic presses such as Sage and Routledge refuse to publish and distribute books written by global south scholars in the global north for the fear of underselling. These publishers have no problem publishing subsidized (yet usually costly for consumers) editions of books from

⁸⁷ Interview with respondent R13, taken by author on July 9, 2012 in Salt Lake City.

⁸⁸R11, 2011.

the US in India. My conversations with academic feminists in the U.S. reveal that university bookstores refuse to order and carry books published abroad, even when they have ISBN numbers, are in English and are affordable paperbacks. Scholars living and working in the global south rarely have resources and networks (such as those formed through regular conference travel or attending US universities as students or visiting professors) to query US university presses about their book manuscripts.

A solution for teachers and researchers to familiarize themselves and their students with non-western feminist scholarship is to find alternate channels of distribution, ranging from acquiring these texts themselves when they travel to working with publishers to create e-books. Not everything can be streamlined, done through formal structures, and feminist movements and knowledge have often relied on informal structures of distribution and recognition. There are online booksellers such as KKA Books (or <http://www.indianbooksonwomen.com>) that track down women's studies and other scholars to sell books. Their sales pitch often positions scholars in the global north as omniscient experts and authorities on "Indian women" or scholars that might find books, women and books on women from India exotic and intriguing. Such problematic assumptions aside, their capitalistic ventures can transform into possibilities for transnational feminist epistemic reciprocity.

Thus, through comparison, pedagogy and reciprocity (CPR), transnational feminist research can perhaps escape the reputation (or one of its several reputations) in the global south of being masked, patronizing first world feminisms, and being a new, improved way of anthropologizing third world subjects, simultaneously "allowing" them

voice and rendering them speechless. In the following section I explore some feasible models of transnational feminist research and collaboration that have taken, and can take place.

Feasible Models of Transnational Feminist Research

This section explores how transnational feminist research can embody and apply the CPR principles and create epistemologically and socially just research projects that have theoretical and practical implications. There are examples of research projects underway that qualify as strong transnational feminist yet most of them do not designate themselves as such. This is attributable to the limited scope and focus of transnational feminism as a U.S. academic phenomenon. I am not claiming that these are *the only* projects that embody the CPR model. I merely use them as feasible transnational feminist models. The projects I will discuss include Navdanya's Biopiracy Campaign; Blank Noise Against Street Sexual Harassment and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). These are organization-based projects which do not strictly follow conventional organizational structure. I will also mention some other, transitory projects that can and have tribute to transnational feminism. Finally, I will suggest some areas that are important yet under-researched in contemporary transnational feminist endeavors.

Navdanya is a project spearheaded by Vandana Shiva. Shiva is an internationally renowned physicist turned environmental activist, and her work has made substantial contribution in praxis and theory of environmental conservation, biopiracy and sustainability. Her commitment to feminism, her critique of the development projects in India such as the green and white revolution which helped the nation state achieve self-

sufficiency in food and milk production with some disturbing opportunity costs, her analysis of women and work and women and social movements are important from both policy and micro-political engagement perspectives. Food and environment form important transnational feminist issues from the standpoint of shared concern and the most exploited: women of the global south.

Shiva's epistemological premise, which is anti-capitalist and anti-colonial, is also deeply essentializing of "Indian women" and valorizing "traditional knowledge" uncritically. Shiva has presented "eastern" religion and spirituality as a conceptual/political alternative to science, as the basis of welfare, conservation, social justice and democracy. She observes, even while critiquing the consumption of spiritualism as a lifestyle choice, "This interest in things spiritual is a manifestation of Western patriarchal capitalist civilization's deep crisis. While in the West the spiritual aspects of life (always segregated from the 'material' world), have more and more been eroded, people now look towards the 'East', towards pre-industrial traditions in the search for what has been destroyed in their own culture" (Mies and Shiva 1993, 19). However, the model of Navdanya as a space of learning, activism and social justice illustrates the CPR model nearly perfectly. It allows for comparison of practices, global-industrial-capitalist and local-collective-biodiverse, showing how the former mode of agriculture is exploitative, unsustainable and coercive (to the farmers and the ecology) while the latter is compassionate, sustainable and democratic. While focused on food production and farming as occupation, important transnational feminist issues, Navdanya

also is a space of knowledge production about economic and food security, patents and biopiracy and democratic and land rights.

Navdanya houses interns and collaborators from all over the world, and involves them in farming, research and community engagement projects that benefit the surrounding communities in Uttaranchal and New Delhi. The research that is carried out here about the effects of global corporate capitalist agribusinesses and traditional/time-tested modes of agriculture carried out by women provides an alternative worldview and praxis for ecofeminism and environmentalist movements worldwide. This locally focused feminist pedagogy is radical and effective. The element of “reciprocity” is reflected in the democratic policies of the organization and the two-way flow of research and discursive traffic, from the two thirds to the one thirds world, between the global south and the north, the latter’s epistemic supremacy broken, the flow of self-repeating western/colonial knowledge disrupted.

While it might be argued that the farm and “seed university” peddles eastern exoticism, the net result amounts to a focus on the “local,” and expending of global labor in service of the local.⁸⁹ Navdanya also brings back the “nation” in transnational feminism and while Shiva has been critiqued as well as supported by many religious nationalists for being western/*Hindutva*-supporter her endeavor does open up a space for

⁸⁹ The Navdanya newsletter (2011) reports, “Each year people from around the world visit Bija Vidyapeeth to learn about ecological agriculture, eat fresh organic food, and enjoy the beautiful simplicity of rural India. We welcome volunteers from all backgrounds—from lifelong farmers to first timers—to join our learning community. Some volunteers come to study agriculture for an entire season; others just to experience farm life for a few days. The only requirement for volunteers is a willingness to try something different and learn new skills.” I have criticized this transient, uncommitted nature of transnational feminist collaborations in chapter three. However, the volunteers and collaborators are required to take Hindi classes, and adjust to somewhat austere rural life in the farm rather than having the farm cater to interns’ and volunteers’ usual habits of comfort and consumption. This is definitely a more just model of collaboration.

debate about the role of nationalism as an anti-colonial as well as colonizing force, depending on the historical moment.

The next exemplary project is Blank Noise, an India-focused but essentially transnational feminist movement against the street harassment of women which I also discussed in chapter four. Blank Noise embodies the CPR principles by comparing ideas and situations of and from victims and resisters of the rampant sexual abuse that limits women's access to the public sphere in Indian and U.S. cities. Blank Noise's radical pedagogy involves people educating each other on laws and strategies that prohibit sexual harassment but which may remain unenforced in the face of society's embedded disapproval of women's independence. The strategies of resistance and reporting include crowd-sourcing all the acts, language and instances of state apathy experienced by the women inhabiting city streets, faced with "eve teasing" as media, people and legislation in India lightly term public sexual harassment. Reciprocity is inherent in the project's bringing together of people worldwide (in collaboration with similar projects in New York City, London and Cairo), against this problem that limits women's occupation, recreation, mobility and social life. Exchanging stories and strategies often ends the violence through anything from public shaming to police reports. Blank Noise fully utilizes the democratic and activist potential of new media to build a collective transnational movement without placing any region, people or form of feminism in a positive frame of reference. This project is ever-evolving, sustainable and effective.

The final project, DAWN, represents transnational (south-south) collaboration that bridges the activist-academic gap by focusing on economic and ecological justice.

Gender is a salient analytical category of DAWN's analysis, and the research produced by this organization is grounded, locally beneficial and globally relevant. DAWN "provides a forum for feminist research, analyses and advocacy on global issues (economic, social and political) affecting the livelihoods, living standards, rights and development prospects of women, especially poor and marginalized women, in regions of the South. Through research, analyses, advocacy and, more recently, training, DAWN seeks to support women's mobilization within civil society to challenge inequitable social, economic and political relations at global, regional and national levels, and to advance feminist alternatives." It has close ties with the UN as well as local women's activist groups (in Fiji, Ethiopia, Uruguay, Mexico and India, to name a few), a democratic structure of governance, and a de-centered, alternative pedagogy and epistemology that disrupt western feminist academic/epistemic supremacy. It has a rotating secretariat (which is now based in Manila) and holds feminist training institutes all over the global south.

I am not suggesting that the abovementioned projects represent transnational feminist utopias or social justice panaceas. They merely seem to embody the just and robust structures of transnational feminist collaboration, relatively free of U.S. academic feminist hegemony and closely embedded in local contexts (within and outside U.S. borders, often in "third world spaces") in spite of their transnational feminist character. These organizations recognize and work with realities of women's lives without theoretically complicating "equality" "rights" and "patriarchy" out of existence. Poststructural theoretical complication and postmodern rhetorical performances do not

alter the reality of the operation and effect of the said processes complicating the lives of women transnationally.

Through my conversations with activists and knowledge workers, it becomes clear that there are under researched issues in transnational feminism whose inclusion might benefit feminists and policymakers in India as well as the U.S. Law comes up as an area of research, as do communication and other gendered technologies. “Women are bound by law everywhere. Women’s low political participation is a global problem. We need comparative transnational legal research and comparing of notes on women in formal politics. Political participation in alternative and grassroots movements has captured many transnational feminists’ attention, why not women and law or women in electoral politics?”⁹⁰ The issues she names seem salient in India as well in as the U.S.; however, as a professor of women’s studies in a university that attracts a lot of transnational collaboration, she marvels at how the woman politician is never quite as interesting as the woman activist, just as the woman technology user does not seem to be a transnational feminist subject, while women affected by technologies always are.

An instance of comparative legal research was a collaborative project in 2010 between Delhi University’s Women’s Studies and Development Center and Warwick University’s School of Law. This project explored how domestic violence laws operated in India and the UK, and it “sought to consider the role of women’s organizations in bringing domestic violence to the public attention in both England and India and their

⁹⁰ R18, 2011.

contributions to the development and management of these initiatives.”⁹¹ The project produced is written in simple language, accessible to academics, activists and anyone with a basic knowledge of English, does not use the term “transnational feminism,” or talk about authors’ processes of writing or self-reflexivity. It does, however, present some strategies that can be or have been implemented in two countries where women’s/feminist organizations have to constantly interface and negotiate and partner with the government to bring about social change. There are also projects underway at School of Women’s Studies in Jadavpur University, Calcutta, on comparative alternate justice systems and feminist projects in India and South Africa. These projects embrace reciprocity by allowing researchers from India to travel and do fieldwork in the country and internationally to understand the role of feminisms, governments and social movements around the world, without positing the world “out there” or “in here” but rather as located everywhere, connected yet divided. The idea is to learn from each other and move forward, beyond critiques of globalization, governmentality and neo-liberalism to develop theories and praxis that embody the four “I”s of feminism.

Parting Shots and Politics of Possibility

Is a just, useful transnational feminism possible? The foregoing comparison of feminist epistemic sites and praxis across two countries suggests that it is. In fact, it can be a useful mode of research to grasp the workings of contemporary globalization that distribute bodies, goods, ideas and information, but often in a framework of neo-colonialism, neo-liberalism and newer, transnational modes of hetero-patriarchy. It is an

⁹¹ This project produced a report titled “Strategies to Operationalize Legislation on Domestic Violence Against Women: India and the United Kingdom,” authored by Dr. Manjeet Bhatia of Delhi University and Dr. Ann Stewart of Warwick University.

important approach to feminist research and teaching and can train new feminists taking women's studies courses within and outside universities to incorporate gender justice in all their endeavors. Feminism is not meant to operate as insulated academic activity; it does more good when it infuses science, technology, academia, politics, business and broader community living with a notion of social justice and interconnectedness of the world. Continuous, reciprocal, equitable transnational feminist exchanges can serve as a basis for resistance movements, and research activities that can benefit all communities, not just academics trying to publish and get tenure. Through comparative legal research, cyberfeminist interventions, responsible epistemological communities, radical classroom teaching, feminist publishers and distributors collective and online crowd-sourced projects the entrenched core-periphery logic of neo-colonial epistemic domination can be subverted. In other words, these initiatives can de-center the west and western discourses, and allow for a two-way traffic of research and knowledge transmission.

Newer areas of research can be comparative policy, legislation, political participation, women in/and science and technology, women in bureaucracy, women in business and women in knowledge production. Existing transnational literature focuses on ecology, citizenship, women's health, political economies and grassroots level movements (this, often located in the global south, as demonstrated in chapters one, two and three), and there is certainly room for expansion and collaboration there.

As chapter three demonstrates, collaboration often devolves to an unequal academic division of labor. This division must be overcome by reciprocity. This can happen when, among other things, feminists from the global north achieve deep fluency

in the history, languages and context of their international subjects, not relying fully on “native” fieldworkers and rethinking their theoretical authority as they re-present data gathered in spaces of “otherness”; feminist theories and perspectives from the global south are incorporated in transnational feminist research and teaching in the global north, as is, if they are in English and translated if they are not. This breaks the cycle of “giving voice” and acting as intermediaries, a role traveling, diasporic feminists are stuck with, or embrace. Research exchanges can be established in universities and research organizations where the “outsider perspective” benefits not only the global south but also the global north as more and more researchers are encouraged to travel to the U.S., Europe and the UK to understand the dominant source and space of global flow and hegemony. Finally the four “I”s, as test of feminist interest and commitment— intersectionality, intersubjectivity, interdisciplinarity and intervention— can be applied to transnational feminist research projects to ensure that some of the promises of political possibilities can be fulfilled.

I want to end with a quote from R20. She said, “We do not feel the need to understand programming as we use computers. We do not need to be experts of physiology as we exist as embodied creatures, or physics as we exist in time and space. Why then, must globalization make it necessary to extract knowledge of everything, every place, every people in the world as we exist on the world? Why should that knowledge gathering and analyzing and publishing about ‘the other’ be such an obsession in the U.S.?” She was not speaking specifically of transnational feminism but she seemed concerned about the colonial mode of knowledge production that must reveal, explain

and categorize the natives (and their land, production, social structures and knowledge) neatly. She felt that as the women's research centers were turning more and more towards local issues and problems and focusing on solutions and strategies, academia in the global north, which includes some universities in India, were rapidly "transnationalizing their research interests."

Another volunteer at the same research organization said: "We (here in India) are tired of being represented. We do not see the point. Do they?" Assuming "they" to be the whole gamut of news reporters, UN researchers, transnational feminists, anthropologists and cultural theorists focused on South Asia that are deeply involved in the job of representing, I being one of them will attempt to keep "the point" in mind as I involve myself in further research. The point being reflexive representation, not erasure; mutuality and not othering. These seem to be effective ways to remain focused on accountability, strong objectivity and epistemic justice in transnational feminisms.

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APPENDIX A
LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS RESEARCHED AND/OR MENTIONED IN THE
DISSERTATION

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS RESEARCHED AND/OR MENTIONED IN THE
DISSERTATION

Aalochana, Pune

Anveshi, Hyderabad

Center for Education and Documentation, Mumbai

Center for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi

Indian Association of Women's Studies Archives, Mumbai

Manushi, New Delhi

Jagori, New Delhi

Parichitee, Kolkata

Shaheen, Hyderabad

Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women, Mumbai

APPENDIX B
LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

- R1: Feminist professor of women's studies in a regional public university in India. Has academic experience in the U.S. and claims a feminist position. Interview date: July 12, 2011. Place: Pune.
- R2: Historian and gender studies professor in a regional public university in eastern India. Interview date: June 11, 2011. Place: Calcutta.
- R3: Author and independent publisher of women's studies books in India. Interview date: July 19, 2011. Place: New Delhi.
- R4: Feminist researcher, litterateur, and archivist, associated with women's movements in India since the 1960s. Interview date: July 13, 2011. Place: Mumbai.
- R5: Head of a women's research center in western India; works in the area of women's political participation and legal rights. Interview date: June 20, 2011. Place: Pune.
- R6: Head of a women's studies program in a prominent university in Southern India. She has experience of serving on UGC committees, and being a visiting academic to the U.S. and Europe. Interview date: on June 24, 2011. Place: Hyderabad.
- R7: Professor and head in a women's studies department as well as a women's research center. She has served in UGC committees as well. Interview Date: July 14, 2011. Place: Mumbai.
- R8: Professor of women's studies in a state university in the U.S., who identifies as a transnational feminist scholar and does research in India. Interview date: September 20, 2011. Place: Phoenix.

R9: PhD candidate in sociology and lecturer in women's studies, in a university in northern India. Interview date: July 25, 2011. Place: New Delhi.

R10: Feminist activist and professor of women's studies and sociology in a national University in India. Interview Date: July 24, 2011. Place: New Delhi.

R11: Feminist archivist and author in western India. Interview Date: July 13, 2011. Place: Mumbai.

R12: Feminist sociologist of international repute, works in a national university in India and has held visiting academic positions in the U.S., Canada, Europe and other countries. Interview dates: June 21, 2011 and February 27, 2012. Places: Hyderabad and Phoenix.

R13: Professor of film and women's studies, in a state university in the U.S.. Interview date: July 9, 2012. Place: Salt Lake City.

R14: Women's research center worker. Interview date: June 23, 2011. Place: Mumbai.

R15: Independent researcher, author and women's rights worker who divides her time between India and the U.S. Interview Date: May 6, 2012. Place: Phoenix.

R16: Researcher in a women's research and documentation center in western India. Interview date: July 13, 2011. Place: Mumbai.

R17: Activist, worker in an autonomous women's research center, and graduate student in a university in western India. Interview date: July 14, 2011 Place: Mumbai.

R18: Political scientist and professor of women's studies who heads a newly established women's studies center in a regional public university in India. Interview date: June 24 2011. Place: Hyderabad.

R19: Women's center worker and women's studies graduate student. Interview date: June 16, 2011. Place: Calcutta

R20: Researcher and activist in a gender justice organization. Interview date: July 18, 2011. Place: Calcutta.

R21: Reader in women's studies at a public university in northern India. Has served on UGC committees, and is experienced in academic travel to the U.S. and other countries. Interview Date: July 25, 2011. Place: New Delhi.

R22: Researcher in a women's center in western India. Interview date: on June 20, 2011. Place: Pune.

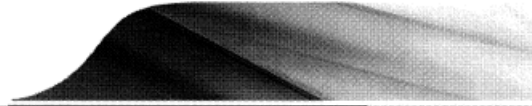
R23: Professor of physics and women's studies in a university in southern India, with academic experience in Indian and U.S. universities. Interview date: July 28, 2011. Place: Hyderabad. .

R24: Professor of women's studies in a National university in India, she also taught and went to graduate school in the U.S. Interview date: July 8, 2012. Place: Salt Lake City.

R25: Owner of a feminist press with publishing experiences in the U.K., U.S. and India. Interview Date: June 13, 2011. Place: Calcutta.

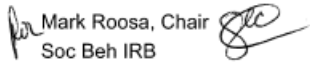
APPENDIX C
IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENT

IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENT



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Sally Kitch
SS

From:  Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 04/27/2011

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 04/27/2011

IRB Protocol #: 1104006336

Study Title: "Going Transnational": Politics of Transnational Feminist Exchange in India and the United States

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.