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Is Postsocialism Transnational?

In a dramatic statement at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, women representing former state-socialist countries proclaimed that they had been “intentionally shut out” of the so-called global conversation on women’s rights (Posadskaya-Vanderbeck 1996). Their “Statement from the Non-Region” (Nowicka 1995) was a response to the rigidity of the global women’s rights discourse at that time. It seemed that in 1995, at the pinnacle of the international expression of women’s rights, there was no room to let a whole new (second) world into the conversation. A decade later, women from the former second world are still proclaiming that their perspectives are “missing in action” (Roman 2006). The persistent neglect of the former second world begs the question: is postsocialism transnational? Where do the experiences

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1 I am referencing the East-West Caucus press release “Voice from the Non-Region” (Posadskaya-Vanderbeck 1996) and the “Statement from Non-Region” (Nowicka 1995), which was presented at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. In her reflection on that time, Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck (1996) states, “We informed the secretariat that we were going to present our position to the press conference, and that we believed we were being intentionally shut out.”

2 See also Graff (2003), Forrester, Zaborowska, and Gapova (2004), Corcoran-Nantes (2005), and Cerwonka (2008a, 2008b).

3 I use the term “postsocialism” to refer to those countries that experienced state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe and the USSR. For the purposes of this essay, postsocialist countries, postsocialism, and the (former) second world are used as interchangeable concepts. I do this because I am making an argument about the role of metageography in shaping feminist discourse in the United States. I ultimately want to challenge the coherence of such categories but find it instructive to use them for my analysis. I recognize that the concept of postsocialism has other dimensions as well. For example, the term could also include those countries that allied with Marxist-Leninist ideology (such as Angola, Vietnam, and Grenada). Another
and voices from the former second world fit in transnational feminist discourses, and why have they been forgotten?

Despite attempts to exceed the limitations of the three-worlds metageography of the Cold War, many of its symptoms remain.\footnote{I am borrowing the concept of metageography from Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen. They explain that “by metageography we mean the set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world” (Lewis and Wigen 1997, ix).} Within U.S. women’s studies, the turn to internationalize knowledge production has instituted an intellectual pathway to certain locations in the world. The critical shift in language and epistemology from the international to the transnational in feminist scholarship has not, however, thoroughly addressed the way that the three-worlds metageography informs our thinking about place, difference, and power. I ask what the historical and intellectual processes are that have generated the most common internationalizing formula as global woman = third-world woman → global South = location of transnational feminist analysis.

The lack of focus on the second world obscures the fact that it has always been a part of the global. Thus, what would it mean to include the second world? Given that it is not a homogeneous place, how can the diversity of experiences in the former second world be preserved in the rethinking of the transnational? If we stay committed to some of the feminist goals of transnational thinking, such as destabilizing fixed geographies and seeing the intersections and hybridity of power, the inclusion of the second world should problematize the three-worlds metageography, including the coherence of the so-called former second world. In fact, reconciling the exclusion of the second world requires a recognition of the fact that the three worlds were never equivalent. The most powerful configuration of the three worlds was the dual dichotomies between the first/third and first/second. This essay grapples with how to rethink the three-worlds metageography and ensure the substantive geographic and theoretical inclusion of the former second world in a recalibration of post–Cold War transnational feminist thinking.

I argue that the concept of Eurasia is a starting point for advancing the project of rethinking and inclusion. More than a synonym for the second world, the concept of Eurasia can be useful for problematizing the metageographies of current transnational feminist thinking. If used critically, Eurasia has the potential to decenter Europe, Russia, and the United States as the primary units for comparative measurement. This opens up possibilities for thinking across and between the former second
and third worlds as well as seeing the asymmetries and linkages that are characteristic of “a transnational world” (Kaplan 1994, 148).

Before we can simply adjust the omission of the second world in transnational discourses, it is important to think through the dynamics that have contributed to its ongoing status as a nonregion. In particular, I am interested in how this neglect has been integral to the disciplinary knowledge production of area and international studies as well as women’s studies in the United States. And given U.S. intellectual hegemony, it is crucial to explore this particular location. In addition, the dynamics that led to the frustration of postsocialist representatives at the UN conference in 1995 contribute to why the second world is not viewed as a difference in U.S. women’s studies approaches to including global difference.

I analyze the process of internationalizing women’s studies, and the transnational turn precipitated by that process, to argue that the three-worlds metageography excludes the second world from the assumed terrain of global and transnational feminist discourses in the United States. First, the meaning of “global” in the United States is embedded in a racialized understanding of difference. To invoke the global in the United States is to reference a particular understanding of racial and ethnic difference. This has produced a double essentialism—of both third-world and second-world women. Second, in tandem, area studies knowledge production and Cold War ideological production have framed the second world as uncritical of, and the third world as critical of, the West. In the post–Cold War context, this simplified geoideological assumption persists and informs which cultural and historical examples are associated with social criticism. Postsocialism gets lost because it is largely presumed to be a process of democratization or Europeanization and thus uncritically positioned vis-à-vis the first world. Third, stereotypes and assumptions about Eastern European women during the Cold War were perpetuated in the post–Cold War context when the hegemonic Western formula for advancing democratic rights was not unequivocally embraced in the former second world. While feminists studying global women have not read the former second world as a difference, feminists working on women’s movements have had a hard time seeing women’s activism in the second world as well.

The majority of this essay is dedicated to delineating the forces that have kept the former second world in a nonregion status within feminist scholarship in the United States. Yet there are important intersections between the forces operating at the U.S. level and those operating at the transnational level. Therefore, I also indicate dynamics that have maintained the three-worlds metageography and that have come about as a
result of specific (post–)Cold War power relations in and across the former second world.

In the last section of the essay, I engage the concept of Eurasia in an attempt to spur a broader conversation about postsocialism as a critical part of the global. I speculate about the concept of Eurasia and the function it can play in altering not only who gets represented as part of transnational feminism but also which conversations are forged and listened to. In elaborating the usefulness of Eurasia, I suggest a number of questions that would reorient our thinking away from the long-standing three-worlds metageography.

Making U.S. women’s studies global: Coming in from the Cold (War)

The notion of a politics of location has long been a critical point of interrogation in women’s studies (Hawkesworth 2006). Emerging in the United States in the 1980s, the term was used to challenge the idea that there was a singular or stable female subject of feminism. Feminist standpoint theory and its critics also raised questions about the epistemological importance of women’s location in society (Hartsock 1983; Collins 2000). In these debates, the issue of location was complicated by multiple and intersectional perspectives about gender, race, sexuality, and other registers of power difference. Thus, the politics of location came to represent a broader debate about the subject of feminism and feminist criticism.

This concern about location included a critique of parochialism in women’s studies (McDermott 1998). As participants in the effort to “internationalize the study of women and gender,” Janice Monk and Deborah Rosenfelt (2000) recall that by the early eighties “the work of racial and ethnic minority women scholars in particular, of lesbian scholars, and of some scholars trained in cross-cultural and international area studies had thoroughly questioned who was the ‘woman’ in ‘Women’s Studies’” (2). There was also a twin, and intersecting, process at work challenging the U.S.-centric focus of the study of women and gender: the racial, ethnic, and at times class critique of women’s studies in the United States played into the phenomenon of globalizing women represented by the United Nations Decade for Women (1976–85), the successive UN-sponsored world conferences on women and parallel nongovernmental organization (NGO) meetings, and the growing sector of transnational feminist networks (TFNs; Moghadam 2005). Third-world and third-world-identified women of color in the United States created important bridges between these two discourses. When U.S. foreign policies that were integral to neocolonial and nondemocratic arrangements in Latin America, Africa,
and Southeast Asia were mirrored in U.S. domestic-welfare and law-enforcement policies that maintained racial and class hierarchies, feminists connected the dots to challenge the hegemony of U.S. power. That link between third-world women and women of color in the United States exemplifies the history of racial politics at the heart of making women’s studies global.

An important vector of the initiative to make women’s studies global includes grant-supported work integrating international studies and women’s studies. The structure of international studies in the United States at that time illuminates how the international was delineated and how that map of the world was and is represented in women’s studies. Government funding for education and research shaped how the world’s nations and peoples were divided into cultural areas of interest. The regions making up those areas evolved in three ways: there was the Eastern studies program; the anticommunist, anti-Soviet program; and the development program. The disciplinary map that such divisions tended to create included Middle and Near Eastern studies, Soviet studies, and third-world and development studies.

In response to the deep ideological trappings of this area studies system, various intellectual projects emerged. For example, the creation of ethnic studies programs, including American studies, drew critical attention to the United States as an area of research. The field of postcolonial studies was particularly important in altering the epistemological frameworks of area studies programs. Edward Said’s influential book *Orientalism* inspired others to formulate anti-imperialist criticism. In addition to the focus on a postcolonial critique of the orientalist East-West dichotomy, there was a critique of the development (or modernization) approach to area studies (Tinker 1990; Kabeer 1994). The paradigm of women-in-development challenged the masculinist vision of economic development promoted by states and international donors and inserted research on women in developing countries into mainstream policy and academic discussions (Tinker 1990).

These postcolonial and postdevelopment challenges to area studies were focused on the first/third world axis of exchange and oppression. Both the Cold War and the historical (neo)colonial first/third world tension played a role in directing the focus of area studies prior to 1989. Importantly, most

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5 The University of Arizona was the first to undertake this type of project in the 1980s. The National Council for Research on Women lists thirteen similar projects as part of a disciplinary effort to integrate international and area studies into women’s studies (and vice versa) in the 1990s (NCRW 2007).
of the criticism of these area studies approaches came from the critical perspective of the so-called third world. When it came time to integrate international studies and women’s studies, this metageography was in place and directed that integration. To challenge the U.S.-centric focus of women’s studies in the eighties and early nineties typically meant developing a racial and economic analysis of that first/third world dichotomy.

The curriculum development programs initiated across a number of U.S. women’s studies departments in the eighties and nineties illustrate this process of internationalizing. A nationwide effort in the mid-1990s supported by the Ford Foundation and initially facilitated by the National Council for Research on Women “began to encourage curriculum transformation efforts aimed at internationalizing the study of women in the United States” (Lay, Monk, and Rosenfelt 2002, 2). For example, the Internationalizing Women’s Studies: Crosscultural Approaches to Gender Research and Teaching project at the University at Albany, SUNY (1996–98) funded three conferences and other work on internationalizing gender and women’s studies curricula and research practices, increasing gender and women’s studies research and teaching “in other countries, particularly in the Third World,” and providing opportunities for collaboration. The emphasis of those programs was on the third world, with the exception of a few schools that had liaisons with women in the (former) second world.

The initiatives to make women’s studies global were important for expanding the focus of the field. Yet during the past three decades some of the underlying assumptions about what “global” constitutes have perpetuated a restricted typology for and of global feminist analysis. Rather than fault specific people or institutions for not including the second world, I want to turn to the question of where the second world was situated in the eighties and nineties. I do not think there was any intentional decision to exclude certain voices. At the same time, women in the second world have always been part of the global, even if not associated with it from the perspective of U.S. women’s studies.

**Finding the nonregion in the global: Can the postsocialist speak?**

Some comparative historical markers are instructive for thinking about where the second world has been positioned vis-à-vis global developments. If we take the UN timeline as one indication of the global turn in women’s

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6 This quotation originally appeared on the NCRW’s Web site at http://www.ncrw.org/initiatives/wsaisins.htm; however, this page no longer exists.
studies, then the beginning of this movement is marked by the UN Decade for Women (1976–85) and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. From the perspective of Central and Eastern Europe and the USSR, other dates are important for grasping the significance of this time period. The Soviet suppression of the 1968 Czech uprising forced continued adherence to the Warsaw Pact and Comecon (the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, an organization supporting the socialist planned economies). The economic chaos of the late 1970s propelled opposition groups in Poland and Hungary to challenge the Soviet economic model. Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and instigated his policies of perestroika between 1986 and 1991. The Berlin Wall was officially down in 1989, and Western and Eastern Germany reunited in 1990. The USSR dissolved in 1991 when most republics declared independence from the union. The following year the Treaty of Maastricht established the European Union in name. Between 1990 and 1992 the Yugoslav state unraveled into various independent states, some of which were engulfed in ethnic conflict. Finally, in 2004 eight former state-socialist countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia) were incorporated into the European Union.

This is just a small list of dates. But why look at them? One basic, though significant, point is the role of the Cold War in filtering women’s voices from the Eastern bloc and the USSR within the evolutionary process of global feminism at the UN level. While representatives from those countries took part in official UN activities prior to 1989, whether they were able to act as independent agents is another question. In addition, tight restrictions and repression of civil society certainly kept representatives from the USSR and Eastern bloc from participating in parallel NGO conferences. In many respects, the full entrance of women’s voices from the second world into the United Nations and international stage could not occur until after 1989–91 (Konstantinova 1996). Given the

7 Government representatives from Albania, the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the USSR, and Yugoslavia were present at the 1975, 1980, and 1985 UN women’s conferences. In comparison, government statements were submitted to the 1995 Beijing conference from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia/Hersegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

8 A plethora of organizations emerged after 1989 throughout the region (see Ruffin, McCarter, and Upjohn 1996; Lang 1997; Sloat 2005). Women had always participated in formal and informal political arenas, but the context of political and economic transformation...
historical reasons for the exclusion of the second world, we may need to inquire how solidified the discursive meaning of “global feminism” was by 1989 and whether the entrance of new and diverse voices from former socialist states has been able to alter that discourse.

In addition, the radical changes in Europe and the former Soviet space precipitated new questions of inclusion and altered relationships within and across the former second world. In countries such as Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, the end of state socialism precipitated conversations about a return to Europe. In Russia, the question of what constituted the new nation-state after Soviet hegemony was central, including, for example, new vulnerabilities based on disputes about borders (with regions such as South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Tartarstan, and Eastern Siberia). And in other states, long-standing border conflicts flared with the drastic shift in geopolitics (e.g., in Nagorno-Karabakh). In countries like Ukraine and Georgia, the issue of coordinating a new relationship with Russia based on a clearly defined titular nationality was of major concern. Central Asian countries such as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan faced the rise of new authoritarian regimes and the revalorization of religion as a cultural practice. We cannot safely say, then, that the postsocialist space is or was a homogeneous place. Moreover, this comparative time line and the diverse effects of the collapse of Soviet hegemony highlight that many areas of concern within the second world were not registers of debate at the level of international women’s rights.

Locating the second world transnationally also involves considering the narratives that shape its representation. For example, the first-world to second-world funding relationship that supported the work of women’s organizations in the second world was double-edged because, while the money was certainly helpful, it often came at a cost (Mendelson and Glenn 2002; Hemment 2004). For some this donor-recipient relationship maintained the first/second world axis. The second world was viewed as the needy recipient and the first world as benevolent patron. This pattern also may have stalled dialogue between the second and third worlds. What is more, certain countries were more commonly portrayed as the global representatives of postsocialism (Eastern Europe and Russia), whereas other post–state socialist nations came under different geoideological categories, such as Central Asia, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. It is possible that there are deeply problematic racial and ethnic assumptions behind such distinctions.

created new opportunities and needs. For example, the decline in women’s formal political participation has given way to an increase in women’s civil political participation (Roth 2007).
Furthermore, women’s organizations in the region did not just join the happy network of transnational feminist organizations; there were considerable tensions and struggles within the region and across the East-West divide. Yet those struggles were not centrally incorporated into the field of transnational feminist knowledge production in the United States. Perhaps there was an assumption on the part of U.S. (as well as Western European) feminists that Eastern women were not a cultural other who necessitated nuanced cross-cultural dialogue. As Silke Roth (2007) argues, “Despite the previous conflicts between women from the Global North and South, for example at the UN conferences, it was not taken into consideration that differing experiences of living under (former) state socialism and in democratic capitalist (welfare) states might impact on the communication between eastern and western women” (464). Different perspectives on feminism, for example, have been a large part of the conversational tensions between East and West. And, while feminism in the East, West, and global South are not monolithic, there are strikingly similar perspectives coming from the East and global South (Slavova 2006). In countries where civil and political rights are kept from most citizens, women and men have created solidarity despite the presence of sexism.

One dynamic that explains why the critical difference of the state-socialist experience did not register (nor did the commonalities between the second and third world) is the way many in the United States viewed the second and third worlds during the Cold War. As I describe above, the third world was associated with anticolonial and critical views of the West. On the other hand, dissident voices originating from the second world were understood as opposing totalitarianism and Soviet hegemony. While certainly not the assumption of all, the dissident or anti-Soviet position was presumed to also be pro-Western. The predominant U.S. perspective mythologized the link between anti-Soviet critique within communist states and the West, using figures such as Aleksandr Solzhe-

Although the focus of this essay is on knowledge production in the United States, there are also important discussions in European women’s studies about the hegemony of Anglo-American feminist writings, the tensions between Western and Eastern Europe (particularly about the meaning of Europe after 1989), and the challenges of networking within and across the European Union and the wider region (Griffin and Braidotti 2002). Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti acknowledge the power dynamics at play when “Judith Butler’s work, for instance, is known and read in even the most materially deprived of European countries, whereas the work of women from those countries themselves remains virtually unknown outside of their own land” (2002, 27–28 n. 2). Their edited collection is one example of the ways in which European feminist work is in many respects ahead of U.S. feminist research on working through the former three-worlds metageography.
nitsyn, Václav Havel, and Milan Kundera as poster children for the horrors of communism. In contrast to postcolonial theories, which developed during and through the demise of colonialism, critical reflection on the relationship between the West and second world did not occur until after the collapse of the USSR. And, at that point, most scholars in U.S. area studies found such an investigation moot. Francis Fukuyama’s claim about the “end of history” exemplifies that attitude. With the end of the Cold War and the elimination of capitalism’s other, postcolonial and third-world critiques were left to challenge neoliberal globalization while the former Soviet Union and Eastern bloc were left to the normalizing processes of democratization and Europeanization.

This simplification of the geoideological positions of the second and third worlds contributes to both the exoticization of third-world women and the erasure of second-world women. And yet if we look at the abundance of writings and organizations from the second world, it is clear that there is not a monolithic voice or an uncritical embrace of democratization. On the contrary, women were critical from the start, as many witnessed and experienced the gendered impact of the triple transition (economic, political, and social). The manifesto of the Independent Women’s Democratic Initiative in Russia declared, “Democracy without women is no democracy.”10 This slogan became a rallying cry for women’s organizing in the early nineties (Sperling 1999). Tat’iana Zhurzhenko (1999) argued that the market was constructed as a masculine sphere where only men could play the rough-and-tumble game of capitalism. Where the establishment of democracy coincided with the violent formation of new nationalisms (and the defense of old ones), for example, in the former Yugoslav republics, women criticized the effects of war. The Nationalism and Feminism conference in Ribno, Slovenia (June 1994), is another example of women critically engaging the transitions in their countries (Anderson 1996).11 Milica Antić (1991) argued in the early nineties that in Serbia and Slovenia (which were still part of Yugoslavia at the time), “What is going on with women throws a bad light not only on the ‘process of democratization,’ but on certain democratic processes too. So far women have been almost entirely marginalized as political subjects” (151).

At the national, interregional, and transnational levels, women’s or-

11 Another example is the What Can We Do For Ourselves conference held in Belgrade (June 1994) and organized by the Belgrade Women’s Studies Center (see Lukić 1996).
ganizations were actively part of global feminism in the early nineties. For example, in response to the lack of careful concern for women in former state-socialist countries at the Beijing conference, the Karat coalition was formed in 1995.\(^\text{12}\) As stated on the group’s Web site, “KARAT Coalition was established as a response to the invisibility of women from Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) and their concerns and needs in the international area” (Karat Coalition 2000–9). The coalition is an important networking device for organizations across the CEE and former Soviet Union (FSU) region. The Network of East-West Women (NEWW) is another important example of collaboration across the region and across the East-West barriers of the Cold War. Facilitated by computer technology and e-mail, women have been able to communicate about what is happening in their lives and in their countries (Robbins n.d.). NEWW, which was established in 1991, “connects women’s advocates who work in partnership to promote women’s rights and to strengthen women’s role within civil society” (NEWW 2001–9). Furthermore, networks such as Karat and NEWW have monitored gender and development issues from the perspective of the CEE/FSU region.\(^\text{13}\) More recently formed, the Gender Informational Network of South Caucasus and the Women’s Information Center link women’s groups in the Caucasus.

In addition to TFNs, women’s and gender studies centers and programs developed in the region. As with the funding for civil society development, many programs were the result of direct foreign support.\(^\text{14}\) And while there are important reasons to be critical of such initiatives (see Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2002; Zimmermann 2007–8), it is also true that these programs have generated and nurtured a critical and regionally specific voice for widespread (and global) consumption.\(^\text{15}\) However, there is

\(^{12}\) Regional networking also occurred in advance of the 1995 meeting in an attempt to put forward a voice from the former state-socialist region and to address the particular issues that were relevant there at the time. The Women’s Health Counts: Conference on the Health of Women in Central and Eastern Europe (Vienna, 1994) is one example (see Kickbush 1995).

\(^{13}\) The NEWW project EU-CIS Gender Watch 2007–8 is a good example of the multiple tasks of networking, monitoring, and advocacy that such TFNs are doing. See http://www.newweu/en/conference/2008/index/0.html.

\(^{14}\) Allaine Cerwonka summarizes these donors and programs in a recent essay (Cerwonka 2009, 87).

\(^{15}\) Rather than rely on secondary sources, it is possible to access writings by authors in the region via many of these programs. The Khar’kovskii Center for Gender Research gives access to a full range of texts by authors in the former Soviet sphere. See http://gender.univer.kharkov.ua/.
a problem of access that can keep the voices of women from the region, particularly those in countries with fewer state resources, from wide distribution. To address this obstacle the Center for Gender Research in Almaty, Kazakhstan, established in 2002, provides access to conference papers and other texts from the Central Asian states. The libraries that many of these centers have created are archives of noncirculating materials that attest to the presence of critical voices in the region (the Estonian Women’s Studies and Resource Centre and the Moscow Center for Gender Studies are examples).

All this is to say that, despite the relative absence of the second world in the global turn in U.S. women’s studies, women in the region have always been a part of the global. The main reasons I have provided for this absence include the racialized politics of globalizing women’s studies, the structure of knowledge production by area studies during the Cold War and the critiques of that knowledge production prior to 1989, the historical silencing (and stereotyping) of women and issues about gender in state-socialist countries during the Cold War and in its aftermath, and the common geodeological assumption that the second world is pro-Western (lacking critical theory) while the third world is anti-Western (and the source of critical theory). In the next section, I turn to a discussion of the emergence of the concept of the transnational in U.S. feminist academic work, particularly the way it is used as a corrective to the ethnocentrism of the global-sisterhood approach to internationalizing women’s studies and promoting global women’s rights. Many of the principles of the transnational interjection are crucial to any future approach to bringing the second world into the wider conversation in U.S. women’s studies. There are also parallel critiques of Western feminism coming from the second world, though they have not entered the mainstream discourse of transnational feminist theory and thinking.

Making U.S. women’s studies global: From international to transnational interjections
The criticisms of the predominantly white feminist articulation of women’s oppression in women’s studies in the eighties returned in the nineties (and in the new millennium) as criticisms of global sisterhood (Lay, Monk, and Rosenfelt 2002; Moallem 2006). Like those who challenged the hegemonic Anglo-American (and Eurocentric) feminist subject of oppression, feminists working in area and international studies contested the essen-

ialized representations of global women. From the theoretical locations of postcolonial and development studies, feminists brought a more nuanced understanding of what a global feminist perspective could mean (Narayan and Harding 2000; Shohat 2001). These voices challenged the idealism of global sisterhood and the approach to global gender research and teaching that perpetuated a colonial gaze. They also provided new approaches to feminist solidarity—not based on essentialized notions of women’s oppression but from the rocky and complicated place of the transnational.

I focus on three principles of the transnational critique of global sisterhood to show that the ideas coming out of this field, which is primarily focused on the first/third world tension, could and should be in conversation with the ideas discussed regarding the first/second world tension. Ultimately, I want to use these principles as tools for rethinking the three-worlds metageography despite the fact that the current parameters of what the transnational means have excluded the second world. A conversation about the second/third world divide will challenge the doubled binaries that make up the three-worlds metageography. In fact, the three-worlds system never really was a troika but a set of two power binaries: first/third and first/second. Moving beyond that framework will trouble not only those individual worlds as coherent and hermetically sealed places but also the fixity of the two sets of binaries.

Feminists engaged the concept of the transnational to address the essentialism of the politics of location. In some cases, the global turn to the politics of location relies on romanticized and rigid understandings of the local and the global. Differences between local and global, Western and non-Western, exist, but they are not symmetrical or essential categories. More than a synonym for globalization or a descriptive concept for a historical juncture, the term “transnational” is a feminist mode of analysis that challenges the categories of place and difference that global sisterhood has relied on. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2000) explain that “in our collaborative work we decided to use the term transnational instead of international in order to reflect our need to destabilize rather than maintain boundaries of nation, race, and gender” (2).

The kind of transnational critique of location that Grewal and Kaplan articulate is instrumental for feminist methodology and theory—not only in the context of studying “other” women or societies but for grasping the always already interconnected character of power, oppression, and culture. A second element of the transnational critique disputes the universalized understandings of women’s oppression and the global sisterhood that aimed to challenge it. Across cultures, the assumption that the
same kind of patriarchy and the same mechanisms of power kept women at a disadvantage was exacerbated by Western women’s tendency to represent the oppression of other women around the world as homogeneous. Such representations “discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular ‘third world woman’” (Mohanty 1991, 53).

There are also assumptions about women from the second world. Americans romanticized the communist rhetoric of women’s equality and failed to see how “really existing socialism” influenced the choices and opinions of women after the Cold War (Holmgren 1995). The application of Western feminist theory to the postcommunist context led to the false assumption that Eastern European women are “backward,apolitical, full of apathy” (Slavova 2006, 248). The implementation of democracy and capitalism did not result in the fantasy many who lived during socialist dictatorships had imagined, but women’s responses to that complex reality also did not mirror the mainstream U.S. feminist response to inequality (i.e., a women’s movement). The lacuna left by the socialist welfare state has been filled by hotlines, shelters, and women’s issues campaigns, yet many of these groups define their strategies in terms other than gender and rarely as feminist (Einhorn and Sever 2003, 171). While the third-world woman was framed as a passive victim of oppression, the second-world woman was framed as suffering from false consciousness.

The composite concept of “woman in Culture X” not only led to flawed research but troubled the making of feminist solidarity. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that “a transnational feminist practice depends on building feminist solidarities across the divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief, and so on” and thus that there is no simple or singular understanding of oppression (2003, 530). And, as one theorist from the post-socialist region asks, “How do we speak of feminism which is other than Western feminism, if not as feminism which is other to it, which would presuppose Western feminism as the parameter?” (Duhaček 2000, 129).

The third critique of global sisterhood is the related issue of what the proper response is to oppression. Feminists working on the multifaceted and complex effects of economic globalization have revealed the inadequacy of simply advancing liberal political rights as the singular solution. The rights to work and to equality in the workplace are central themes in the mainstream women’s rights agenda in the United States. Yet, as many women around the world, and in the United States, can attest, work is not unproblematically or universally liberatory. In countries that have undergone neoliberal development programs (e.g., structural adjustment
programs), the development of new jobs can be a double bind for women (Benería 2003; Peterson 2003). By working, women gain access to wages and possibly new forms of agency in their families, but the terms of their personal economic advancement do not tend to propel them, or their countries, beyond the structural constraints of economic globalization. Yet feminists and governments in first-world countries have emphasized wage labor as a linchpin of gender equality, viewing both gender and wage labor as central to understanding and combating oppression.

Wage labor, however, is part of the dynamic of domination and not just a solution. For instance, in former socialist states, gender equality and wage labor were mandated. The effects of that mandate were mixed; women were placed in political and economic spheres viewed by the first world as progressive, yet they did not necessarily experience that access as emancipatory or symbolic of real power. As Kornelia Slavova (2006) explains, “By working within existing social and political structures, liberal feminism’s framework proves to be too narrow to explain the ambiguous situatedness of socialist women who are simultaneously located inside and outside power relations” (251). This narrow focus on individual rights (the right to wage labor, the right to abortion, and so forth) does not show how rights can be burdens (252) nor how women see their oppression outside of an individualistic framework (Funk 2004).

Across the three transnational critiques of global sisterhood, perspectives from both second- and third-world experiences intersect. Yet, for the most part, the central themes and voices within U.S. transnational feminist thinking do not incorporate second-world difference as a category of difference or diversity. I want to say a bit more about the racializing aspects of the global and transnational turn in U.S. women’s studies as one of the reasons why this is the case. I discussed other reasons earlier, but this one deserves more analysis because of the severity of the pitfalls it creates and the potential for new cross-worlds thinking about oppression and hierarchy it offers.

The transnational turn in feminist discourse was meant in part as a critique of the essentialized categories of “other” women, such as third-world women or African women. In addition, there was an interest in decentering the West as the authority regarding research on women’s global issues. A transnational approach was seen “as an effective way to launch a strong (and long overdue) departure from U.S.-centric scholarship in its many forms” (Soto 2005, 112). To some extent this did happen. Yet there also remained a tendency to read “transnational” as a proxy term for “women of color” by essentializing the teachers and areas of that subject field (Lee 2000; Soto 2005). In this respect, the concept
of the transnational operates as a racialized category within women’s studies.

The persistence of this dynamic in the United States may be caused by the ongoing tensions and questions about decentering the Anglo-American (heterosexual) female experience as the subject of feminism. One can euphemistically refer to transnational feminism without explicitly showing that one means nonwhite or non-Western. But what is the investment in perpetuating this equivalence? I think one reason has to do with the intellectual heritage of the transnational interjection, namely, a critique of orientalism. As I have argued, the binaries created by the racialization of both the West/non-West and the first/third world axes have produced the transnational feminist field. In fact, there may be a double essentialism at play here: an essentializing of women of color representing women outside the U.S. context and an essentializing of the second world as a place without racial and ethnic difference. As postcolonial and third-world criticisms of the Western gaze were incorporated into the field of women’s studies, the turn to the transnational problematically linked specific ethnic and racial groups to those studies. In the United States, the second world was largely painted as an ideological, rather than racial, other. Although there is ample evidence of the ongoing racial and ethnic imaging of the East (Wolff 1994; Todorova 1997; Kovačević 2008), the emphasis of racial analyses is on the particular racial constellation of the United States, such as the enslavement of Africans and white supremacy, the genocide of Native Americans, and the violence and discrimination directed at immigrants from the third world living in and risking their lives to get into the United States. I have foregrounded this U.S.-based model of producing the other because, significantly, the racial politics of the global character of the United States has shaped what the global means outside the United States.

However, it is important to link the critiques that women of color have made of the ways that “global woman” stands in for “racial/ethnic difference” in the United States with the critiques of the assumption that second-world women are not a part of the global. This is important because these critiques are symptoms of the same flawed knowledge production and the same three-worlds metageography. While transnational feminist research is vital to envisioning post–Cold War feminist analysis, the concept of the transnational has not yet facilitated a radical departure from the dominant model that divides the globe along a first- and third-world axis. I am not advocating that we simply insert perspectives from the former second world. Nor do I suggest that research on third-world women’s issues is no longer important unless it relates to CEE and the FSU. However, we should think
about what we mean by the designation of a post–Cold War world that
does not include views, experiences, or practices from the former second
world. Ironically, it is precisely the end of the Cold War that has brought
about so many of the practices and challenges of globalization that are of
care to feminist scholars. Yet the former state-socialist space falls between
the cracks—between the predominant discussion about neoliberalism that
opposes the first and third worlds (or the global North and South) and
between the racialized discussions of orientalism that oppose the West and
the non-West. As Vera Mackie (2001) argues, we should think about the
hybridity of identities and operations of power that go “beyond the short-
hand term ‘orientalism’” (183).

What would it mean to exceed these deeply rooted intellectual and po-

tical boundaries? Of course, there are already examples to draw from. My essay concludes with a speculative conversation on the concept of Eurasia
as a tool for rethinking the second world as a legitimate difference and at
the same time as a place and identity that challenges the three-worlds metageography. To bring the second world in should entail the recognition of
the experiences of state socialism as part of the global, and at the same
time it should resist the problems of ethnocentrism and oversimplified
categories of women that plague the ideology of global sisterhood.

Finding Eurasia for transnational feminist thinking: Beyond and
between the postsocialist and the postcolonial

There is an urgent need to center our analytical attention on postsocial-

ism before it is too late, before any notion of postsocialist difference is
subsumed, without question, into our broader discussions of capitalism
and globalisation.
—Alison Stenning and Kathrin Hörschelmann (2008, 312)

The urgency of this plea to (re)claim postsocialism before it is too late
clarifies what is at stake if we fail to alter the metageography of transna-
tional feminist thinking. I engage the notion of Eurasia as a starting point
for further discussion on transnational feminist thinking that exceeds com-

17 Increasingly, authors writing on the second world are included in global feminism or
transnational activism anthologies (Naples and Desai 2002; Grewal and Kaplan 2006; Bose
and Kim 2009). For examples of cross-world and interworld thinking that challenges the
rigid boundaries of the three-worlds metageography, see Agathangelou (2004), Marciniak
(2006), Marciniak, Imre, and O’Healy (2007), Kabeer, Stark, and Magnus (2008), and
Tiostanova (2009).
mon geoideological boundaries. My vision of a Eurasian paradigm is also a sympathetic, though cautionary, contribution to recent efforts to analyze postsocialism from the perspective of postcolonial theory. Engaging postcolonial theory for postsocialist studies is an important example of cross-world thinking, and there is already a vibrant field growing from this intersection. Adopting the framework of postcolonialism to reflect on and represent the position of the former Eastern bloc vis-à-vis the Soviet empire and Europe has provided an epistemic alternative to the uncritical language of transformation and transition. This framework is even used to analyze Russia as a victim of internal colonization (Etkind 2001). The tendency to embrace a postcolonial lens in the post–Cold War period as a way to grapple with new and old forms of power relations is an example of linking the experiences of third-world (post)colonialism and second-world postsocialism. I envision Eurasia as a decolonized concept that challenges the boundaries of the nation-state and decenters Europe and Russia as the central focus for understanding power.

However, I hope that postcolonial theory will serve as more than a metaphor or an adaptable lens for the postsocialist context precisely because of the dynamics that I argue have led to the obfuscation of the second world. How exactly might an embracing of the language of postcolonial theory also erase a unique postsocialist experience by subsuming it under the larger rubric of postcolonialism? Is it possible that a turn to postcolonial theory for representing second-world difference may obscure alterity further within that metageographical position? In other words, does the claim to a postcolonial condition privilege the power relationship between Western Europe and Eastern Europe and thus erase other power hierarchies? Given that one of the objectives of postcolonial theory is to decenter Europe, what does this mean for former Eastern bloc countries that now seek European integration? Is a turn to the postcolonial a symp-

18 These conversations are growing and global. Some examples include the newly established *Postcolonial Europe* electronic journal that focuses on literary and cultural studies with an emphasis on Eastern and Central Europe, supported by Stockholm University (http://postcolonial-europe.eu); the Network of Interdisciplinary Women’s Studies in Europe summer school cluster on Feminist Perspectives on Postcolonial Europe (http://cms.hum.uu.nl/athena-studentforum/index.php?option=com_Vcontent&task=view&cid=705&Itemid=60); the interdisciplinary conversations about the relevance of postcolonial theory for postsocialist studies, including the issue of *Ulbandus* titled “Empire, Union, Center, Satellite: The Place of Post-Colonial Theory in Slavic/Central and Eastern European/(Post-)Soviet Studies” (Platt 2003); the coauthored essay “Thinking between the Posts” (Chari and Verdery 2009); and the many essays and edited volumes on the postcolonial in postsocialism (e.g., Todorova 1997; Etkind 2001; Cavanagh 2004; Kelertas 2006; Korek 2007; Zubovskaia 2008; Tlostanova 2009).
Tom of the problem of the nonregion, or is it a solution to it? Subsuming postsocialism under the presumably broader category of the postcolonial also runs the risk of reinforcing the Cold War idea that social criticism originates from the orient or the periphery. The postcolonial turn in the second world may actually be a testament to the rigidity of international discourse that represents alterity.

Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery (2009) argue that we ought to think “between the posts” because they can “offer complementary tools to rethink contemporary imperialism” (12). Rather than use postcolonial theory as a metaphor for postsocialism, we should engage some notion of postsocialism in conversation with postcolonialism. For instance, recent scholarship that adjusts the Cold War Sovietology approach to the USSR shows that the Soviet empire was a multiethnic and multiconfessional space (Breyfogle 2008).

To release the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc from their homogeneous stereotypes opens up a myriad of questions: What are the intersections and tensions between the ethnically and religiously defined Slavic heritages, and how do they play out in places as different as Russia, Poland, and Serbia? What are the hierarchies and intersections between the third-world and second-world other in Europe? How are those hierarchies expressed in the European Union’s approach to Muslims perceived to be within or outside a European cultural heritage? Which diasporas have come to define the meaning of “minority” in the post–Cold War era?

In an effort to think between the posts, I argue that Eurasia is a useful concept for social criticism if imagined as an alternative understanding of the location of and the meanings tied to the former second world. The place of Eurasia should be (re)imagined to include all former state-socialist nations in order to preserve some aspect of a common legacy across the second world—even if that experience was not homogeneous. Ultimately, the meaning of the place of Eurasia need not be limited to the historical experience with state socialism. However, by maintaining a conceptual basket for those countries that did experience state socialism, there is greater opportunity to think about the difference(s) within that experience in the post–Cold War context. I am suggesting that we incorporate postsocialist difference into the global approach to feminist studies by engaging Eurasia as a place on the map. Rather than categorize the former second world as just a derivative of the postcolonial or of neoliberalism, a territorial understanding of Eurasia emphasizes the point that postsocialism is a

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19 “Multiconfessional” refers to the existence of many religions and spiritualities in one country (Breyfogle 2008).
unique place and experience. Consequently, Eurasia emerges as a new epistemological framework that can stimulate critical questions and approaches for transnational feminist thinking. This concept of Eurasia can be disengaged from a Soviet/Cold War temporality and thus invite new cross-world dialogues. I conclude with a brief sketch of the insights this reconceptualization of Eurasia might generate.

Eurasia is a place that refuses to answer the question of borders, homeland, and heritage. It is an antiparadigm (von Hagen 2004) because it displaces the rigid patterns of thought that have forced distinctions between East and West. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, questions of boundaries have intensified: Who can claim a European cultural heritage? Is Central Europe separate from Eastern Europe? What is Eastern Europe? Is Russia European or Asian? Which empire(s) (for example, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Soviet, Ottoman, Mongol) are the referent for claiming a postcolonial standpoint? Eurasia is a concept that embraces such questions as central to the porous, contentious, and ongoing negotiation of the borders of Europe and Asia. While you do not have to choose between Europe and Asia, you do have to wrestle with the many questions posed by their juxtaposition in Eurasia.

This refusal to choose between East and West is also an acknowledgment of the hybridity of power and identities in this space. This hybridity includes what Katarzyna Marciniak (2009) describes as the presence of an ambivalent “in-between space” where there is a disavowal of an older reality and a refusal to conform to the official promotion of the new (176). The common macroeconomic categorizations of development miss the complexities of capitalist accumulation, diasporic flows, global cultural commodification, socialism’s ghosts, and other forces that complicate the simple categorization of hemispheric power relations. These aspects of hybridity are stifled by an East-West dichotomy that privileges the tension between Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and Russia as the most salient, when in fact there are multiple iterations of the East and the West and of the axes that mark the center and the periphery. The spatial concepts of Eastern Europe, Russia, and the second world are not homogeneous; they contain within them multiple others, including an othering of the postsocialist past. A turn to Eurasia as a place would challenge the assumptions about what those spaces constitute and foster greater discussion of the myriad forms of alterity that exist there.

This reimagining of Eurasia also scrambles the current representation of the former second world that gives greater voice to Eastern and Central Europe and Russia, and less to Central Asia and the Caucasus. What if the dilemma of postsocialism were not posed as fundamentally a question
of what Europe is but as a question of what Eurasia is? Eurasia as a place emphasizes the porous and contested nature of the boundaries of that region, and it can evolve from its post–USSR/Eastern bloc imagining. Like the concept of the postcolonial, Eurasia need not refer to a specific place. But, unlike the concepts of the postcolonial or the postsocialist, Eurasia is not bound to a teleological understanding of location. Nor is Eurasia simply a synonym for postsocialist. While it is the mechanism I am suggesting we use to include the former second world, Eurasia is not eternally set as a referent to state socialism.

There are a variety of meanings we could associate with Eurasia, particularly if we think about the term as a historical expression of the transnational flow of people, goods, money, and ideas. For example, the notion of a Silk Road is a historical understanding of Eurasia. A critical engagement with the Silk Road interpretation of Eurasia could shift our attention from the rigid frameworks that dichotomize the East and the West as well as the global North and South. The historical routes that linked China to India, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, Russia, the Caucasus, Turkey, and other locations bordering the Mediterranean Sea (including northern Africa, Greece, and the Middle East) continue to be powerful links in the modern-day web of globalization. An approach that situates globalization in this much more historical framework of the Silk Road begs the question of where the center lies (perhaps Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan?) and what hierarchies characterize the relations between those countries that are resource rich but economically underdeveloped and those that are (more) developed but resource poor.

These and many other questions illustrate that there is a rich landscape to explore if we embrace Eurasia as an alternative framework for both representing and exceeding the limitations of the second world. Eurasia is a dethroning of the questions that have come to define the meaning of postsocialism. If Eurasia is a decolonized concept, then we should now ask: Who is speaking? And who is listening?

References


Suchland


