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# Going Global? Transnationality, Women/Gender Studies and Lessons from the Caribbean

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## Abstract

The word 'global' has entered our everyday lexicon, presented as new, inescapable and often, as inherently positive. This poses considerable challenges in re-narrativizing globalization's trajectories to render visible historical encounters that are productive of difference and hierarchy. This essay offers tentative reflections on notions of the global that underlie the imperial divide between area studies and women/gender studies in a North American context.<sup>1</sup> The essay highlights practices of exclusion via Eurocentric renderings of global sisterhood based on a putatively universal notion of 'woman', and efforts to 'go global' that reduce areas, and people from those areas, to gendered types.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay – and the attempt to specify a relational approach in which feminism is simultaneously a site of critical practice and an object of critique – is the product of a four-year engagement with curricular transformation in women and gender studies at the University of Toronto. In particular I would like to acknowledge Michelle Murphy and Linzi Manicom, with whom these conversations about transnationality and feminism first started and with whom a related essay, "Transnationalising Women's Studies", is in progress; June Larkin, undergraduate co-ordinator; and M. Jacqui Alexander, from whom I learn so much every day. The analysis that is presented here draws on and has benefited greatly from a multi-university study group that included Sedef Arat-Koc (Trent), Ena Dua (York), Kamala Kempadoo (York), Kiran Mirchandani (OISE/Toronto), Shahrzad Mojab (OISE/Toronto), Michelle Murphy (Toronto), Linzi Manicom (organizer, Toronto), Cynthia Wright (Toronto); discussions with colleagues at other women's studies programs; as well as a review of a wide cross-section of undergraduate syllabi.

In response to Mino Moallem's question – "[U]nder what circumstances are we able to claim that we belong to other significant locations that enable new theoretical and political connections?" (2001: 1267) – I see the Caribbean as a space that produces knowledge with important lessons for a remapping of women/gender studies in a Canadian context. In addition to exemplifying a long scholarly tradition of engaging with its insertion into global processes, the Caribbean also has historical and contemporary links to Canada, which belies the artificiality of the separation between the 'women' of women/gender studies and the 'women' of Caribbean (or more broadly, area) studies.

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