



Eastern Sociological Society Presidential Address: Globalizing Gender Issues: Many Voices, Different Choices¹

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Why are the important gender inequality issues different in various countries around the world? This question is answered using a comparative perspective on extant research about gender inequalities in the regions of the world. Just as there is diversity among individual women, based on their intersecting axes of age, race, ethnicity, class, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, or other characteristics, I argue that there is diversity across countries in their gender inequalities based on intersecting axes of transnational, regional, cross-cutting, and unique national issues that structure gendered or feminist concerns within any country. Global and regional dynamics are the interrelated foundations on which broad gender inequalities are built. Major transnational dynamics include neoliberal economics, migration, and violence, while regional patterns include nation building and gendered inequalities in education and property ownership. On the other hand, unique national trajectories and cross-cutting themes, found in a few nations in each region, add much greater variation to those basic inequalities. Some of those cross-cutting themes are problems generated by health status and health services, the relationship of religion to the state, and war or militarism.

KEY WORDS: feminist research; gender inequality; globalization; intersectionality; property ownership; transnational studies.

INTRODUCTION

In choosing the theme of “Intersectionalities and Complex Inequalities” for the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society, I wanted to

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underscore the remarkable theoretical and methodological impact that intersectionality has had on all forms of gender and feminist research over the last few decades—whether one is referring to sociology, women’s studies, or to many other disciplines or interdisciplinary fields. In this article, I want to suggest one way that intersectionality can enhance our understanding of global gender issues.

My starting point is the question: Why are the important gender inequality issues, as revealed in research and movement activism, different in various countries around the world? In asking this question, I am not by any means suggesting that major issues of gender inequality are or should be the same in every nation. By now, we recognize that just as there is a wide diversity among individual women’s and men’s concerns, based on their intersecting axes of age, race, ethnicity, class, marital status, sexuality, religion, or other sources of difference, there is also global diversity in the conditions that are the focus of feminist or gender research. On the flip side, I also am not suggesting that significant gender inequalities are entirely unique in every country or locality, either. Certainly there are commonalities that arise from shared experiences.

Rather, I outline a framework through which to understand some of the patterned differences across nations in their significant gender inequalities. To illustrate and support this perspective, I rely on examples drawn from a broad array of extant research about women’s and men’s issues and gender inequalities in various world regions (including Africa, Asia and the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe) or specific nations, and I demonstrate some of my points using global cartography.

One of my basic arguments is that there are a series of intersecting dynamics, or as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) might say, intersecting axes of oppression, which shape the types of gender inequality visible in any given nation. While most analyses of gender inequality are focused on the particularities of a single nation’s economic, political, social, or cultural conditions and history, I want to suggest that these features can be separated more fruitfully into the four major intersecting axes of transnational, regional, cross-cutting thematic, and unique national conditions that shape the variety of important feminist concerns within any given country. Using this approach, the inequalities located in any given nation, including the United States, can be interpreted or framed in multiple simultaneous contexts. Although these four axes may sound merely geographic, they are much more complex and reflect underlying sociopolitical patterns. Indeed, my goal is to move us beyond the concepts of the Global North and Global South, both because empirical studies show that many gender inequalities do not differentiate themselves globally in this manner, and because theoretical developments over the last several decades have shown us that, although quite useful, these geographic dichotomies often tend to homogenize real conditions. For example, as we well know, significant inequalities still persist, even among the most powerful nations around the globe.

INTERSECTING DYNAMICS CREATING GLOBAL GENDER INEQUALITIES: A FRAMEWORK

This article introduces each of the four axes mentioned above, provides some evidence of their existence, and illustrates several of the intersecting dynamics that create global gender inequalities. I first examine some of the transnational sources of inequality.

Transnational Sources of Inequality

Transnational sources of inequality persist across most nations, and feminist researchers or activists describe them, in one form or another, almost everywhere. The bulk of national and international gender scholarship makes it possible for me to argue that the two primary sources of global gendered inequalities are economic conditions and violence. In the current global era, I also include issues of gendered migration, which are tightly intertwined with economic conditions. If I were using second-wave feminist parlance, I would say capitalism and patriarchy are still perpetuating gender inequalities everywhere.

Perhaps the most pervasive factor shaping worldwide similarities in gender research agendas is the globalized political economy, formed by the movements of corporate capital and labor around the globe. Among the frequent outcomes of a globalized economy are the exponential growth of export-processing zones and the incursion of U.S., European, and Japanese or Chinese products into markets around the world. The contemporary “free market” ideological push that dominates the global economy and keeps promoting privatization policies is leading many nations, including the United States, to relinquish many of their responsibilities for the welfare of their citizens, thus making public-sector workers especially vulnerable. Concomitant trends that are more regionally specific in their impact include neoliberal economic reforms, which have had significant influence in Latin America; structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that create particularly heavy debt burdens for the nations of Africa; and postcommunist restructuring, which is regionwide in Eastern Europe but extends beyond those borders.

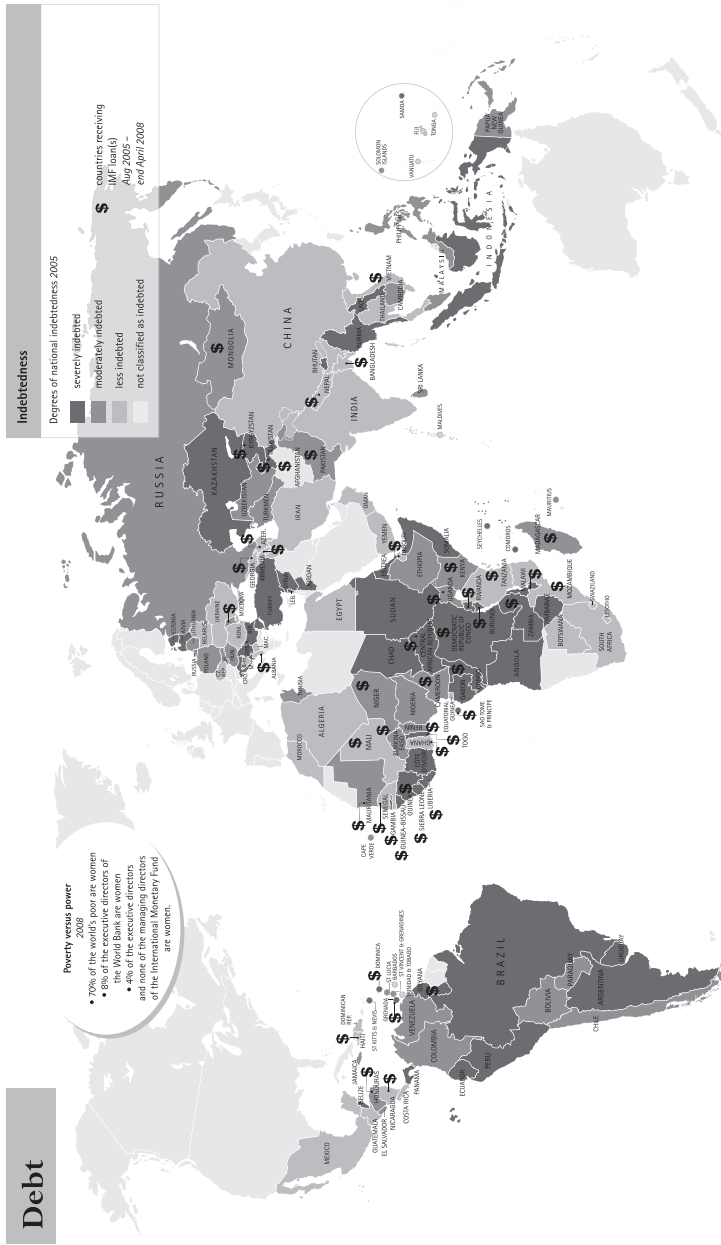
To take one example of the outcomes of economic globalization, one can look at Africa, where from the mid-1980s through the 1990s structural adjustment policies were enacted in more than 40 nations. Gender research in this region reveals that as the civil service and other formal-sector occupations began to shrink during this period, more and more women, even those with university degrees, turned to the informal sector to support themselves and their families (Darkwah, 2002). Scholars also note that SAPs have contributed to exacerbating an already crippling brain drain from Africa, including women who left positions in universities, hospitals, and other government bureaucracies to obtain more stable employment abroad (Osirim et al., 2009).

Figure 1 on international debt, drawn from work by Seager³ (2009), illustrates the ubiquitous nature of international debt, largely to agencies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank, with dark gray indicating the most indebted countries, followed by mid-gray, then light gray, and the dollar signs indicating recent IMF loans. Although some nations, notably the United States and most countries in Western Europe, are not considered as indebted to international organizations, we know that recent economic bailouts in those countries also have left many of them with large national debts.

A second global dynamic that affects women's lives and feminist research agendas is the steadily rising rate of migration, a global labor flow that has become increasingly feminized over the last few decades. Such intra- and international population movements gain impetus from the push and pull dynamics of those same economic conditions that unevenly affect nations and communities, pushing some people to move in search of employment, all the while being limited by citizenship and labor regulations. By 2010, women were 49% of those who migrate internationally. These rates vary by region, from a high of 57% in Eastern Europe to a low of 39% in Western Asia, but in the majority of regions, women's international migration rates are near the global average. About 75% of all international migrants are located in 30 countries of the world.⁴ This new "equality" in migration rates is based largely on the increased number of women who migrate on their own as contract workers—people who go to another country for a specified time period, often to work in fields like domestic or child-care work, food and lodging services, factory assembly lines, or entertainment. Their migration is a key feature of the global economy because they create new, low-cost labor supplies (Sassen, 2002) and, since the 1980s, through the remittances they send back home, women transnational migrants have become an important source of income for their families. They are a frequent subject of global gender research that examines low-wage carework, especially across the Asian region, or on women in global export processing zones. Among the common themes that appear in these studies are transnational families and transnational motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997), the international division of reproductive labor (Parreñas, 2000), issues of citizenship and surveillance (Cheng, 2003), and environmental or occupational health concerns.

³ Reproduced with permission from *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* by Joni Seager, 4th edition. Copyright 2009 Myriad Editions Ltd. (www.myriadeditions.com). Seager (2009:Map 34, pp. 90–91). The oral presidential address, presented on February 26, 2011 in Philadelphia, included nine maps from Seager (2009), projected via Microsoft PowerPoint, using three to illustrate each of the transnational, regional, and cross-cutting global gender axes. Space and cost considerations permit the use of only two maps in *Sociological Forum*.

⁴ United Nations (2010:13–14). In these 30 countries, women's proportion of migrants varies from about 30% in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia to a high of nearly 60% in the Russian Federation. Among the developed countries, including the United States, women are about 50% of migrants, with slightly lower proportions in Germany and Spain, and higher rates of women migrants in France, the Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia.



Source: Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women of the World*, Fourth Edition, 2009, Chart 34.

Fig. 1. Global Differences in International Debt.

Some women who migrate do so unwillingly due to the spread of sex trafficking. Seager's (2009) data show that most nations and all world regions are involved in some aspect of trafficking.⁵ Every region has source countries. To provide a sampling of them, in Latin America and the Caribbean these include, but are not limited to, Jamaica, Honduras, Columbia, Peru, and Brazil; in Africa and the Middle East, other source countries include Ethiopia, Zambia, Angola, and Botswana; in Asia, Burma, Nepal, Bangladesh, Mongolia, and South Korea; and in Eastern Europe, Latvia, Romania, and Albania. The majority of trafficked women are taken to developed countries, such as Canada, Australia, Japan, Taiwan, or the nations of Western Europe, but others' destination is the Middle East, including the countries of Turkey, Syria, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. Each continent also has nations that serve both as source and destination for sex trafficked women—for instance, the United States, Mexico and Argentina, Russia, China and India, South Africa and Kenya.

Although the global economy forms a background for all gender inequalities, a third and almost universal critical worldwide feminist issue is violence against women. Research on this topic is found in almost every country, although the form of violence that becomes a primary feminist research concern may focus on particular national problems, including wife beating; date rape, stranger rape, or rape during war; military prostitution; genital cutting; bride burning (when dowries are perceived as being too small) or acid violence; and many others. For example, domestic violence against women is a worldwide problem, with between 15–70% of women in each nation indicating that they were physically abused by a male partner or intimate.⁶

Since transnational concerns, like violence, migration, and economic conditions, are frequently discussed by authors looking for commonalities among women, and thus of more common knowledge, I turn now to the less researched regional sources of inequality.

Regional Sources of Inequality

Regional sources of gender inequality can reflect similar geographically based political or economic conditions, but they also are shaped by transnational forces. On the one hand, the largely deregulated nature of global capitalism has sustained uneven power relations between the highly industrialized and the developing nations—differences that often parallel earlier colonial ones. On the other hand, the interaction between regions and transnational capital also has caused other changes, such as the opening up of national markets in China or Vietnam, the heightened global importance of production in China and India, the rising flows of contract labor and marriage migration

⁵ Information on specific countries is drawn from Seager (2009:Map 19, pp. 56–47).

⁶ See Seager (2009:Map 7, pp. 28–29).

within Asia, and the increasing contact between resident citizens of Asia, Latin America, and Africa with their diasporic populations.

One of the often-ignored examples is found in ongoing nation-building efforts, such as those on the African continent, where many nations achieved independence between the late 1950s through the 1960s, although some countries were independent earlier and others had to wait until the 1970s or 1980s to achieve their sovereignty. The formation of the African Union, as a nascent transnational body, has opened a unique opportunity for African women to shape their rights, and to do this based on their own experiences, but with full knowledge of what has or has not worked elsewhere. Regional governance mechanisms, like the African Union or the European Union, help combat problems not well handled by individual states, even though some of the current problems in those two regions may be significantly different. Not surprisingly, an important component in African women's social science gender research and activism is the area of politics, the state, and empowerment for women.

A related regional political trend, also common both to European Union and the African Union countries, is the concept of gender mainstreaming, which was first introduced at the 1985 Women's World Conference in Nairobi and was propelled forward as a new intergovernmental strategy after the 1995 Beijing Conference. The goal of this approach is to adopt a gender perspective in all government policies and programs that assesses the impact on women and men of any planned action, and also promotes gender equality as its ultimate goal (United Nations, 2002:5). These programs have the potential to influence arenas that are not usually associated with women, such as trade policies or the military. Considerable feminist research, especially in Europe, concerns the opportunities and limitations in implementing gender mainstreaming. The political dilemma for them is deciding how to strategically incorporate gender mainstreaming into policy making, while simultaneously maintaining feminist agendas outside the government that challenge patriarchal domination, especially by suggesting entirely new policies.

There are other important regionally related dimensions of inequality, especially women's access to education, property ownership, and good jobs—these are fundamental equity issues for women in the developing regions of Africa, the Middle East, Southeast and South Asia, and large portions of Latin America and the Caribbean. While education is a primary indicator of a person's human capital resources in developed nations, literacy is a better measure for developing nations; and literacy (and the concomitant illiteracy) rates are a component of gender inequality that has a strong regional variation. Most of the developed nations of North America, Europe, and Russia, Japan, and Australia, for example, have low women's illiteracy rates of 5% or less. Next highest are Latin American and Caribbean women's illiteracy rates, which range from less than 10% up to 25%. However, most African and South or Southeast Asian nations have rates beginning at 26% and can be

over 75% of all women.⁷ Furthermore, nations with the highest illiteracy rates also tend to have the largest female-male gap in literacy levels although, globally, illiteracy is declining over time.

Literacy, along with access to reading materials, is fundamental for women's political and economic rights and information. Thus, it is significant that while Internet usage shows vast differences in international access to the web, at the same time, no matter how limited Internet service might be, men and women have nearly equal access—especially in East Asia, Western Europe, and North America.⁸ As social networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are playing increasingly large roles in galvanizing social change movements, the distribution of the Internet and mobile phone service becomes critical.

Education and information access are important determinants of gender equity; so are economic resources such as property ownership and employment. The map in Figure 2 helps visualize the regional concentration of restrictions on women's rights to own, inherit, and/or control property and other forms of wealth as of 2008, with gray tones indicating countries with restrictions, and light gray/off-white for unrestricted countries (or those for which information is unavailable). Such limits are generally found across roughly two-thirds of the African nations, and almost all of the Middle East and South Asia.⁹ Why is this problematic? First, globalization tends to shift previous communal or household-based ownership, in which women shared, to a focus on an individual-oriented cash economy (Seager, 2009). Without ownership rights and collateral, nonusurious business loans can be hard for women to obtain. Thus, it is no surprise that micro-credit organizations and women's banks originated and flourish in these locations, providing women's primary access to cash loans. Second, lack of economic resources makes it more difficult for women to leave problematic marriages and survive on their own, or to resist the female genital surgery that sometimes is required in some countries in order to be married.

The percentage of women who work for pay varies across nations, but also within regions. Thus, few regional generalizations can be made except that the women's paid employment rate is the lowest (less than 40%) in North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.¹⁰ There are additional regional patterns related to the type of work involved. The vast majority of women work in the service sector in North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Europe; while work in the unregulated informal economy (excluding agriculture, but including domestic work, street vendors, market selling, and other roles) involves nearly half of all women working for pay in Latin America and North

⁷ See Seager (2009:Map 28, pp. 78–79).

⁸ See Seager (2009:Map 31, pp. 84–85).

⁹ Reproduced with permission from *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* by Joni Seager, 4th edition. Copyright 2009 Myriad Editions Ltd. (www.myriadeditions.com). Seager (2009:Map 32, pp. 86–87).

¹⁰ Seager (2009:Map 21, pp. 62–63).

Africa, and more than two-thirds of working women in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹ Most of these jobs do not pay well, and not surprisingly, there is a female-male earnings gap in almost every nation.

Unique National Sources of Inequality

Despite the importance of the first two transnational and regional axes, gender inequality in any particular country is not shaped only from the outside by large-scale forces. In many nations there are unique localized political, economic, or cultural dynamics that intersect with those broader patterns.

An interesting example of these political dynamics is found in Spain where, due to Franco's strong emphasis on women's traditional family roles during his nearly four-decade dictatorship (1939–1975), feminist researchers in the early post-Franco years tended to avoid issues of the family and instead stressed women's needs in the arenas of work and politics (Valiente, 2002). An example of how cultural and racial dynamics can shape inequalities is found in Brazil, where feminist researchers have worked to challenge the myth of a national Brazilian hyper-sexuality and the prevailing national discourse of being a racial democracy (Heilborn, 2009).

There are also national-level difficulties in the creation and distribution of feminist research on gender inequality—related to reaching national and/or international audiences. One barrier pertains to language or terminology. For example, the word “gender” is novel in some countries such as China, whose language is not rooted in a Latin or romance language system (Chow et al., 2009). In those countries, feminists deal with the issue of terminology either by inventing new terms or adapting existing ones, while also trying to avoid linguistic postcolonialism and the political charge that their gender or feminist research is merely a “Western import.” More generally, though, there is a reverse problem, where language barriers and monolingualism hinder feminist thoughts that are developed in non-English-speaking Global South countries from even reaching feminists in the Global North (Knapp, 2009).

A nation's political climate or economic resources also can limit the number of outlets in which to publish information on gender inequalities. As a result, research findings may be published in the journals of more developed countries, reducing local access to knowledge—which has occurred especially in Francophone Africa; or, results may not be published until funds are available—which has occurred in Cuba. Cuban scholars also found that lack of research funds helped shape their research methods, making in-depth interviews or participant observation more expedient for data collection than expensive large-scale surveys (Núñez Sarmiento, 2009). On the positive side, research can be distributed via the Internet or in feminist magazines, rather than in poorly supported or nonexistent local academic journals, so that

¹¹ Seager (2009:Map 22, pp. 64–65).

findings ultimately reach a wider feminist activist audience. Indeed, many feminist nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) publish feminist social science research, especially in nations such as Iran, where academic publications will not do so (Ezazi, 2009). Furthermore, universities in many developing nations have supported gender research institutes, even when they do not have teaching programs in women's or gender studies.

Cross-Cutting Themes of Gender Inequality

Transnational scholars have considered global factors, area studies scholars have researched regional factors, and country specialists have focused on national factors that shape the worldwide variation in gender inequalities. I suggest a new fourth factor or axis that is based on what I term the "cross-cutting themes" that influence just a few countries, which are scattered across several regions. I argue that this type of gendered inequality could give impetus to cross-regional alliances among women's groups. Three cross-cutting inequities stand out in my reading of the international gender literature—health and health services, the relationship of religion to the state, and war or militarism. I describe these three issues in more detail because scholars do not usually think about them in this cross-cutting manner.

Health concerns are probably the most highly visible inequities because of global concerns over the transmission of HIV/AIDS to women and children. Although every region has AIDS cases, infection rates vary considerably across the nations within any region. For instance, HIV and AIDS are critical problems in Africa, where infection rates are among the worlds' highest and there is a unique overrepresentation of women suffering from them. Nonetheless, looking across Sub-Saharan Africa, over 20% of adults are infected in Botswana, but less than 5% in many nations of Western Africa, such as Nigeria, Niger, Mali, and Chad, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola.¹² HIV and AIDS also are key feminist concerns in selected nations within other regions, such as the Southeast Asian countries of Thailand and Vietnam, or the Latin American nation of Brazil, where prostitution is legal and there is a well-established sex tourism industry. This suggests to me that cross-regional alliances between African and Asian women from the most AIDS-plagued nations could prove useful.

Although perhaps a bit speculative, I also see potential alliances between other nations in these same two regions over the health and reproductive-related issue of "missing women." For example, in some parts of Africa, there are too few healthy women to care for the growing number of AIDS orphans—with missing women due to infection. Meanwhile, in China, South Korea, and India, sex ratios in certain provinces reveal a shortage of adult women compared to the number of men, creating problems for men seeking

¹² For more specific countries, see Seager (2009:Map 15, pp. 48–49).

spouses—but in this case, due to son preference and the concomitant sex-selective abortion. Shared creative thinking about culturally sensitive national policies or services is needed to deal with the social impact of these sex imbalances in both regions.

A second issue that cross-cuts regions is the engendered relationship between religion and the state, found in a variety of countries ranging from Catholic-dominated ones, through those with strong fundamentalist Protestant movements, to fundamentalist Islamic countries. To take a European example, because of the activist role of the Catholic Church during the transformation of Poland from a socialist to a capitalist nation, it was possible for aspects of Catholic morality to be inserted into the new postcommunist national constitution. One of many outcomes was that the existence of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, or transgender individuals was legally denied—these groups have few rights and some argue that they are rendered largely invisible (Mizelińska, 2001).

Other examples can be found in the application of Islam to family law, especially in North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and some regions of Francophone and Anglophone West Africa. In Senegal, the practice of Islam is central in the secular state, and it affects laws related to marriage, divorce, death, and inheritance, as well as women's right to work. Or, consider Nigeria, which is a federation of 36 states that also is thought of as a secular nation, but some states, predominantly in Muslim Northern Nigeria, historically have functioned under Shari'a Islamic law for centuries. In the late 1990s, Nigeria's Shari'a law was extended beyond the typical areas of personal and family law to include criminal law, so that illicit sex and adultery were criminalized, with unequal consequence for men and women. Not surprisingly, African gender studies scholars and transnational feminist networks have been very concerned with the relationship between women's rights and the state under Islam (see, e.g., Osirim et al., 2009; Salime, 2010). International activist groups such as Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) already have been uniting women in Africa and the Middle East to modify some of the inequalities created when conservative interpretations of Islam infuse national laws.

A final example of issues that cross-cut regions is war and/or the militarization of a society. The devastating effects of this kind of military violence have caused many women to become single mothers, experience forced migration, live in internment or refugee camps, or suffer various forms of "noncombatant" violence, such as genocidal war-related rape and its consequences. In addition, many young boys have been forced to become soldiers in various conflict zones throughout Africa. At any one time, some regions may experience more conflict than others. In recent years, African and Middle Eastern nations have had more conflict than Europe, but within Europe, the Balkan conflict and the break-up of the former Yugoslavia was significant in the late twentieth century, especially for the global impact of the subsequent international trials concerning war rape and ethnic cleansing.

Nonetheless, ever since the year 2000, some countries in every region have experienced periods of major armed conflict or ethnic tensions.¹³ There have been ethnic tensions, violence, and human rights struggles by indigenous populations within Latin America, especially in Mexico and Guatemala; and in Indonesia, Tibet, and Burma within Asia. There also have been civil conflicts, famine, hunger, kidnappings, and, sometimes, genocide in Rwanda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Eritrea within Africa. More recently, we have seen democratization protests and concomitant government violent responses in several Middle Eastern countries, among them Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and Libya; as well as international interventions such as the U.S. “war against terror” in Afghanistan and Iraq.

There also is pervasive violence in every nation in the form of murder of women by their intimate partners. At the same time, one particular form of murder—honor killing—is concentrated in a just a few countries across several regions, notably in North Africa (Morocco), the Middle East (including, but not limited to, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, and Iraq), and Southwest Asia (e.g., India, Pakistan), as well as in a few European countries that receive migrants from them, and in a few Latin American nations (e.g., Brazil).¹⁴ To address this situation, a Middle Eastern and Asian alliance of women activists could prove useful, perhaps linked to their diasporic populations as well.

CONCLUSION: BRINGING THE INTERSECTIONS TOGETHER

Before proceeding to synthesize my four intersecting axes—transnational, regional, national, and regionally cross-cutting dynamics—that account for the pervasiveness of and variation in global gender inequalities, I want to suggest one caveat: while the gender inequalities that we can empirically identify usually give impetus to feminist activism and/or gender-focused research, not all inequalities do so. Several conditions shape which gender inequalities scholars or activists see as priorities, and I want to note two of them. The first is whether social movements direct scholars’ research questions, or if the available research and scholarly knowledge shape activism. In some countries, such as in Costa Rica or Puerto Rico, national women’s movements still provide the impetus for feminist research, raising pressing concerns that researchers have sought to address around issues of violence against women, peace, reproductive rights, workers’ rights, immigration, or international trade agreements. In other cases, feminist research may or may not provide the foundation that activists can use to argue for solutions to important local women’s concerns.

The second set of conditions is whether the knowledge is locally generated or if the analyses are generated transnationally by organizations such as the United Nations. The four Women’s World Conferences sponsored by the

¹³ For specific countries, see Seager (2009:Map 38, pp. 100–101).

¹⁴ For additional countries, see Seager (2009:Map 8, pp. 30–31).

United Nations from 1975 to 1995 have had a significant impact in gathering data about the status of women around the world, in monitoring progress in the more measurable areas (Ashford and Clifton, 2005), and in formulating some semblance of a “global agenda” on women’s rights. In addition, transnational networks such as Development Alternatives for a New Era-DAWN (a global network of women’s scholars and activists), or the regionally focused Women in Development Europe-WIDE network, or Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) have provided research that became the basis of policy changes. Overall, feminists and women’s groups in developing countries tend to be more aware of the efforts of such international organizations and agencies than their counterparts in the United States, resulting in more activism over global inequalities there than in developed countries.

In conclusion, let me discuss how my four intersecting axes integrate themselves into global patterns of gender inequalities. When discussing an individual’s position in a single society, I might say that his or her gender, race, class, sexuality, age, religion, citizenship, and other sources of difference intersect simultaneously and are so intertwined that they are hard to separate, even though certain life settings might bring to the fore one or two of these dimensions more than others. The parallel construction would be to explain the gender inequalities of any single nation as a function of their global, regional, and national situations, combined with any cross-cutting themes, including those that were mentioned above.

But I am interested in a different angle on this latter question, which is: What factors allow us to group some nations together based on their similar gender inequality issues, the bulk of their research, or their movement activism? I cannot provide a complete answer to this question yet, but I think that complex global, regional, national, and thematic issues not only interact, but also are layered. Global and regional dynamics are the interrelated foundations on which broad gender inequalities are built. The hegemonic character of the current global capitalist economy and the global acquiescence to a deregulated “free market” mentality continues to shape socioeconomic conditions in most countries and to exacerbate inequalities within and between nations. In the same way, many of the regional similarities are based on structural adjustment or other economic development plans imposed by highly industrialized countries and international financial organizations, were created by other postcolonial dynamics, or emerged through nationalist movements intended to combat them. On the other hand, unique national trajectories and cross-cutting themes found across regions add much greater variation to those basic inequalities.

My geographic and map-based examples are intended to illustrate some of these patterns and clarify my argument. It is all too easy to use a broad brush in painting global gender inequalities as either all the same or as all unique—and my goal is to challenge that type of Global North-Global South dichotomy. U.S. gender researchers need to become more attuned to the different voices of women, domestically and globally, recognizing their agency and the particular choices they make in their own daily lives because, as many

now agree (Tripp, 2006), the cutting edge of the women's movement is no longer in the United States. Rather, the new key issues are being defined in the regions that have historically been considered the "developing" ones of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

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