

**The Theory and Practice of
Promoting Democratization:
Women's Issues**

**Prepared for International Studies Association
Southern Region Annual Conference
November 3-5, 2005, Miami, Florida**

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Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Mapping the Terrain: Feminism's reflection on differences within the women's community	4
Revisiting Habermas' Deliberative Democracy	6
The Liberation?	9
<i>Personal Recollections</i>	9
<i>Women's Issues during Soviet Times</i>	10
<i>The Discursive Practices of Western Feminists in Soviet Space</i>	
– <i>Observations of a Local Participant</i>	12
<i>Beyond the Communist World</i>	13
<i>The Hardships of Transition – Post Soviet Experience</i>	13
<i>Transition Problems in Muslim Societies</i>	14
<i>The Trap of the Political Project of Western Feminism</i>	15
Empirical Implications of Deliberative Democracy	16
<i>Solving Inter-Group Problems</i>	17
<i>The Discourse</i>	17
<i>Feminism, Communicative Action and Conflict Resolution Theory</i>	19
The Feminist Workshop Project: Coordinating the Macro-Purpose and Micro-Process	21
<i>The Kelman Model</i>	21
<i>A Women's Workshop Model</i>	22
<i>Content: Topics for Discussion and the Problem of the Subaltern</i>	24
<i>Content: A Liberal, Open-ended Approach to Topics</i>	24
<i>Modalities of Discussion: The Importance of the Setting</i>	25
Epilogue	27
Bibliography	28

The Theory and Practice of Promoting Democratization: Women's Issues

Introduction

Today our country is engaged in an ambitious project for the rapid and aggressive promotion of democracy around the world. In particular, our administration seeks the democratization of the Muslim world. The dominant idea is that spreading democracy will serve as a means of resolving conflicts between “the West and the Rest”, which in turn is intended to improve U.S. security. The current “wave” of democratization has some novel features. One of them is that today’s democratization-by-force seeks liberal-democratic ends through the use of “real-politic” means. Another significant feature is the treatment of women’s rights. According to the witty comment of writer Paul Berman, “The Afghan War ... was the first feminist war in all of history – the first war in which women’s rights were proclaimed at the start to be a major, war aim” (Berman, 2004, 195). The recognition and enforcement of women’s rights are now considered to be among the major generic criteria of democratization.

The struggle for democratization that is supposed to bring liberation to the people of the Middle East and elsewhere does not, however, enjoy widespread, international popularity. Even if we legitimately regard suicide bombing as a criminal activity, rather than an expression of protest, numerous public opinion polls in the Middle East show a very low regard for the motives and means of American policy. (Pew [Research Center 2004, 2005 a, b](#)). Interestingly, the opinion of female respondents in the Middle East differs little from that of males. Some women’s NGOs, like the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq, make a special point of resisting American occupation and/or domination of their countries.

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This paper addresses two mutually related cases of discrepancies between theory and practice. One set of disparities includes issues surrounding the disconnect between the theoretical base and the practical implementation of the US-championed process of global democratization, as reflected in women’s issues. The other group of discrepancies includes tensions that exist between feminist scholarship on the one hand and politically prescriptive projects of feminism on the other.

The hypothesis is that in order to remedy the widespread misunderstanding and/or disagreement of non-Western women with the American promotion of democracy and women’s rights, greater attention is required to the development and refinement of the current *process* of cross-cultural, international women’s discourse. In particular, it could be helpful to pay more attention to the development of agency for a wider engagement of feminist scholarship in the praxis of feminist activism.

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The paper starts with a brief, partial survey of feminist research addressing the issues of diversity within the women’s community. The main purpose of the survey is to outline the theoretical terrain of awareness and reflections on the multiplicity of discourses produced by the diversity of life-worlds of women in different cultures. As the review underlines the fact that much of the literature is focused on the diversity of woman’s experience, the paper then turns to Jurgen Habermas’ theory of deliberative democracy, which also focuses on diversity

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and inclusion, but in a broader, social and democratic context. The model of deliberative democracy has been further developed by a number of authors, including Cohen and Arato (1992), Nancy Fraser (1992) and Seyla Benhabib (1992, 1996a, 2002). Building upon and drawing from the findings of the theorists of deliberative democracy and discourse ethics, this paper follows with a discussion of the possible application of a deliberative model of democracy for the mitigation of multicultural women's disagreements.

The last two parts of the paper are mainly concerned with the practical implementation of theories. The penultimate part of the paper reflects on heuristic paradigms and discursive practices of Western feminist, grassroots activists in the former Soviet Union during the early 1990s and currently in Islamic countries. These paradigms and practices, as analyzed by a number of researchers (Jaggar, 2000; Tayyab, 2000; Mahmood, 2005), appear to contribute to enduring misunderstanding and even tacit conflict within the multicultural women's community. These misunderstandings and conflicts are contributing to the futility of the attempts of the current U.S. administration to rally Muslim female support for the West's democratization of their countries.

The last part of the paper discusses the possibility of feminism borrowing some methods and techniques from the field of conflict analysis and resolution for the practical implementation of various theories. In particular, the paper addresses the practical implementation of the theory of deliberative democracy and its discourse ethic. The borrowing of methods and techniques appears quite appropriate, given, for example, the similarities between feminism and conflict resolution regarding their interdisciplinary character and their dual, theory-practice nature. To the extent that the current situation in the multicultural women's community also reflects a tacit, internal conflict, borrowing some means of conflict resolution seems to be logical. Finally, the paper discusses some concrete conflict resolution agency in its possible implementation in practical multicultural feminist encounters, as a means for carrying out deliberative democracy's discourse ethics in real life.

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Mapping the Terrain:

Feminism's reflection on differences within the women's community

In the 1930s Virginia Wolfe wrote: "As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (Wolfe, 1966). These words were a virtual encapsulation of the credo of the second wave of feminism into the 1970s, with its emphasis on the commonality of experiences and concerns of all women, most famously reflected in Robin Morgan's pronouncement that "sisterhood is global." However, within the last thirty years significant changes have occurred in the concerns as well as in the approaches employed by Western feminist theory. Some authors consider these changes in feminism as amounting to a paradigm shift (Mohanty, 2003, 460). During the last 30 years feminists more and more often have assimilated new subjective and methodological domains, reflecting the political, cultural and philosophical developments of the period, from the political successes of decolonization and civil rights to the methodological achievements of post-structuralism and deconstruction.

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These new “multicultural, global, and postcolonial feminisms that have been developing around us” brought new perspectives, approaches and concerns that, as Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding argued, “cannot simply be added to those of the mainstream feminist philosophies of the last few decades without disturbing the latter, any more than the mainstream feminist concerns could be added to conventional philosophical categories and assumptions and leave the latter untroubled.” (Narayan and Harding, 2000, VII) From an “essentialist” position of the quintessential Woman that originally dominated the writings of the second wave of feminism, these new feminisms moved to contextualized positions and concerns of diverse Women (e.g. blacks, Chicanos, lesbians, Muslims).¹

Obviously the positions, interests and methodologies of these “feminisms of diversity” vary significantly. What they have in common, however, is a concern with the issues of the (often voiceless or muted) “Others” of modernity and a dedication to imagining, developing and implementing more democratic, inclusive and egalitarian theories and practices. These appear to be overarching concerns variously interpreted in numerous “languages” by different authors, from Hazel Carby to Ann Ferguson, to Gloria Anzaldua, to Saba Mahmood, and many, many others.

The multiplicity of voices of “Others,” whether whispered, shouted or unvoiced, needs some systematic framework of interpretation, if it is to be more than a cacophony. One framework that has been utilized has been that of the contemporary political philosophy of multiculturalism. In that approach, individuals with common denominators are lumped together into discrete cultural groupings, and separate groupings or cultures are looked at individually, with little comparison between groups. In feminism, as members of any given community are likely to produce, in large part, fairly similar narratives, it seems logical to unite those similar narratives into internally discrete cultures.

The problem with that approach is that it assumes rather monolithic cultural identities. It seems that the multicultural approach is replacing the single meta-narrative of universalism by multiple meta-narratives of several cultures, each of which is perceived as inherently homogenous. In other words, the difference between universalism and multiculturalism seems to be a quantitative difference between qualitatively similar types of thinking.

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However, cultures appear as reified, internally monolithic entities only to outsiders. Each of us as a participant in a cultural group has a chance to appreciate the inherently complex, multi-voiced and diverse character of it. Therefore, the mere representation of different cultural groups cannot meaningfully reflect the full range of diversity within the real or ideal, international women’s discourse community, nor can it meet the task of forming a more egalitarian, inclusive and diverse discourse structure

Moving beyond multiculturalism, an additional systematizing framework might be found in the ideas of social constructivism, as expressed in the works of Vygotsky, Brunet, Bandura and others. According to Yale’s Seyla Benhabib, social constructivism, “is a very broad concept in social theory that covers distinct methodological strategies, ranging from

¹ The egalitarian claims of multiculturalism can be traced to the social anthropology of the early 20th century (Mead, 2001, a, b; Levi-Strauss, 1971, 1995, 2000), with its criticism of Eurocentric cultural aloofness.

postmodernism to critical social theory, from postcolonial studies to Marxist and non-Marxist functionalism.” (Benhabib, 2002, 10) In broad terms, the set of ideas and schools of thought united by the term social (sociological) constructivism share the presupposition that “individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live in.” (Kim, 2001).

An important notion within social constructivism is the concept of inter-subjectivity. “Inter-subjectivity”, Barbara Rogoff writes, “is a shared understanding among individuals, whose interaction is based on common interests and assumptions that form the ground for their communication” (Rogoff, 1991). Social constructivism appears to be a possible tool for working toward a more inclusive and egalitarian, if diverse, women’s discourse. It is assumed that the success of such work is dependent upon a more cross-culturally shared set of female/feminist social meanings. Within the logic of social constructivism, the existence and the specific modes of “inter-subjective” (female) communication are vitally important to the creation of widely shared social meanings. The imperative of communication leads one to reflect upon the theory of communicative action initially developed in the works of Jurgen Habermas.

Revisiting Habermas’s Deliberative Democracy

There is a rather large amount of feminist scholarship that interprets, discusses and critiques the philosophy of Habermas. Authors like Nancy Fraser, Joan Cohen, Marie Fleming, Allison Weir and many others have analyzed different aspects and different periods of Habermas’s thinking through the lens of feminism. A significant amount of feminist scholarship on Habermas has been pulled together in the single volume entitled “Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the subject of Discourse” (Mehan, 1995). That work has contributed significantly to the understanding of the philosophy of Habermas and to an understanding of a wide range of moral, political and psychological issues.

The critiques of the early social theory of Habermas were mainly developed along the lines of the necessity to explain the gendered character of the bourgeois public and private spheres (Fraser, Cohen and Fleming). Habermas’s later theory of deliberative democracy and communicative action (i.e. the discourse ethics) was mainly criticized for over-emphasizing the rationality of deliberation and excluding the caring or affective emotion (Braaten, Warnke, Dean, Chambers). Overall, as Mechthild Nagel writes, “Meehan’s contributors are marked by what Rawls would call an ‘overlapping consensus’, as they want to correct Habermas’s social and ethical theories while remaining loyal to his framework”. (Nagel, 1997,309) The “corrections” of course have the form of “gender repair.”

The interest that this paper has in the practical potential of Habermas’s theory is not focused on “gender-repair.” Rather this paper wishes to suggest that Habermas’s discourse ethics can be used as a tool for the “repair” or modification of *intra-gender*, communicative practices between women of “the West and the Rest,” as Samuel Huntington would say. There is good reason to refrain from further gender-sensitization of the theory. As valuable as the project of “gendering the subject of discourse” is, it seems to be only obliquely relevant to the construction of an *intra-gender*, female discourse. Gendering is necessary when the

subject is the whole body politic, in its naturally-sexed and socially-gendered duality, as was the case both for Habermas's texts and for their feminist critiques. However, when the subject is the construction of an *intra-gender*, female discourse, the communication proceeds "in a different voice" virtually by default, unless it is intentionally constructed to model "the big boys' discourse". Besides that, the Habermasian model of deliberative democracy exercised through communicative action has already been developed to the degree of overcoming "gender-blindness", as well as other alleged forms of "group-blindness."

Seyla Benhabib, while disagreeing with the idea that deliberative democracy necessarily leads to "gender blindness" and "group blindness," has articulated that idea quite well:

"It is frequently argued that the focus on *publicity* and on *public forums* in models of deliberative democracy also created a bias in that such institutional spaces and practices privilege a certain model of disembodied and dispassionate form of speech.... This consequently excludes speech of groups such as women, sexual, linguistic, and ethnic minorities; and native American peoples whose modes of discourse may be more embedded and passionate, based on storytelling and forms of greeting." (Benhabib, 2002, 138).

Disagreeing with such ideas. Benhabib asserts:

"First, deliberative democracy need not proceed from the *unitary model of the public sphere*. The public sphere in the Habermasian deliberative democracy model, which Cohen and Arato..., Nancy Fraser... and I ... have developed further, is not a unitary but a pluralistic model that acknowledges the variety of institutions, associations, and movements in civil society. Sociologically, the public sphere is viewed as the interlocking of multiple forms of associations and organizations, through the interaction of which an anonymous public conversation results. The decentered public sphere consists of mutually overlapping networks and associations of opinion-forming as well as decisional bodies. Within these multiple and overlapping networks of publicity, different logics of reason giving, greeting, storytelling, and embedded speech can flourish".

Benhabib adds a consideration with which one can completely agree:

"Second, I find the assumption that politically and culturally underprivileged and marginalized groups represent "the other of Reason" to be a species of exoticism. Why are we so quick to assume that reason corresponds to domination, while the body corresponds to marginalization and promises some form of liberation? There are different traditions of narrative style and reason giving and story telling among human groups; but we would do well not to impose metaphysical binarisms like reason versus body, impartiality versus embodiedness, upon such differences" (Benhabib, 139).

These clarifications of the deliberative democracy model underscore its potential utility as a broadly inclusive, analytical and practical aid for the assessment and construction of a feminist discourse.

Habermas' thoughts on deliberative democracy and its discourse ethic were expressed in his two volume magnum-opus, The Theory of Communicative Action, which was published in 1981 and translated to English for the first time in 1983. In general terms, his principle idea is that modern social theory should be couched in terms of the self-other relationship, in which we communicate with the others as subjects, rather than perceiving them as objects. This inter-subjectivity of "undistorted communication" constitutes, according to Habermas, an "ideal speech situation", shaped by a mutual determination to avoid distortion and manipulation and reach understanding and consensus.

Habermas substantiated his model through the following logical chain: "The social world as the totality of legitimately ordered interpersonal relations, is accessible only from the participant's perspective; it is intrinsically historical and hence has, if you will, an ontological constitution different from that of the objective world which can be described from the observer's perspective. The social world is inextricably interwoven with the intentions and beliefs, the practices and languages of its members." (Habermas, 1999, 38). That is why, according to Habermas, if all participants of a certain discourse rationally accept the moral validity of a norm, their rational acceptance by itself "justifies the claim that the norm is worthy of recognition".

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To further elaborate the notion of the discourse ethic, with its emphasis on inter-subjective communication under the conditions of the contemporary multi-cultured, multi-subject world, Habermas wrote: "Discourse ethics defends a morality of equal respect and solidaristic responsibility for everybody. But it does this in the first instance through a rational reconstruction of the contents of a moral tradition whose religious foundations have been undermined. If the discourse-theoretical interpretation of the categorical imperative remained bound to the tradition in which it originated, this genealogy would represent an obstacle to the goal of demonstrating the cognitive content of moral judgments *as such*. Thus it remains to provide a theoretical justification of the moral point of view itself." (Habermas, 1999, 39) This theoretical justification can be found in the discourse principle.

"The discourse principle," Habermas wrote eloquently, "provides an answer to the predicament in which the members of any moral community find themselves when, in making the transition to a modern, pluralistic society, they find themselves faced with the dilemma that though they still argue with reasons about moral judgments and beliefs, their substantive background consensus on the underlying moral norms has been shattered." (Habermas, 1999, 39). In other words, the discourse principle is in a sense a substitute for the disappearance of an intuitively clear, shared ethos. If we often cannot understand another person (and sometimes ourselves!) through the shared meanings of a common ethos in today's globalized and multi-cultured world, we should be able to explain ourselves and to understand others through engagement in a rational discourse.

As mentioned above, gaining knowledge and an understanding of others are not the only targets of a social theory that is constructed in terms of a self-other relationship. Another important aim is the development of self-knowledge. Habermas emphasizes the emancipating,

liberating nature of self-knowledge. Giovanna Borradori explained this aspect of Habermas's theory:

“For Habermas, self-knowledge must be oriented to the very specific scope of developing autonomy of judgment and freedom of action... This understanding of self-knowledge is an ongoing theme in Habermas's philosophy, reaching back to ‘Knowledge and Human Interests’ (1968). In it Habermas compares social theory to psychoanalysis. This move underlines that Habermas does not take individual autonomy for granted, as if it were given to human subjects by nature. Rather, he sees it as a function of interpersonal exchange. The dialogue a patient has with a therapist is not manipulative or exploitative, but aimed at stimulating the human potential for self-reflection and self-knowledge” (Borradori, 2003, 46)

Keeping as background the features of deliberative democracy and its discourse ethics, particularly in Habermas' theory, let us look, first, at the societal framework of the former Soviet Union and, second, at other parts of the non-Western worlds into which the discursive practices of Western feminism have been introduced (both by Westerners and by affiliated local activists).

The Liberation?

This paper started with a discussion of the current wave of democratization that is advocated and actively pursued by the U.S. administration. The very notion of democratization as a means of liberation of oppressed people invokes for me and many former Soviets a sense of *deja vu*. As an Armenian and former Soviet citizen, I lived through the fabulous and turbulent years of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. From that perspective, I would like to share some impressions and participant observations of the way in which Western activists (later supported by locals) approached and advocated women's issues in the former Soviet area.

Personal Recollections

In the 1989-91 period of Glasnost, Perestroika and Soviet dissolution, many professional women in the Soviet Union were alternately astonished and overwhelmed by political and economic changes. The Iron Curtain, that had separated us from the free world all our lives, miraculously disappeared. From behind that curtain and with the intoxicating air of our new freedom, there appeared strangers speaking in a different language – both literally and figuratively. Rather than speaking Russian, they spoke English, and their speech was about civil society, non-governmental organizations, free press, and other similar subjects. They rarely knew Russian or any language of the former USSR, so we, the locals, had to struggle hard to understand their language – in both linguistic and symbolic meanings of the word. And some of them seemed to advocate a battle of the sexes, a real conflict between men and women – if only we understood them right, with our limited English.

That was my first encounter with Western feminism. Even now, 15 years later, after the identity shifts, losses and findings, when I no longer can really say “we” about my former

compatriots, the impression is still fresh that Western feminism conflates with conflict and the battle of the sexes. In order to understand the depth and the origins of this extreme if not distorted interpretation of the Western feminist message by many ex-Soviet women, we need to look at the historical context that shaped the narratives and perspectives of those women.

There are a number of works dealing with the history of women's issues in the Russian and Eastern European cultural space. Among the best English-language works is Richard Stites's The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism. As interesting for the purpose of this paper are the works about women's issues that are written by Eastern European (including Russian) authors themselves. Valuable analysis is offered in the works of Olga Voronina, Hana Havelkova, Dimitrina Petrova, Larissa Lissytukina and others.

Women's Issues During Soviet Times

One the first decrees of the Soviet authorities was a declaration on sexual equality. Following Marxist criticism of bourgeois, patriarchic society as an institution of women's oppression, the new Soviet authorities tried to implement, "Engels's and Bebel's view that women's liberation required bringing women into public industry as full equals to men..." (Ferguson, 2000, 521). As a result, the Soviet legislation of the 1920s was probably the most gender-sensitive in the world. Young women from all over the country, including from villages and outlying districts, started to work in factories, participated in construction projects, went to school, entered the professions and otherwise became as productive builders of socialism as men.

It is widely accepted now that this ethos of state-sponsored women's emancipation, as almost everything done by Soviet authorities, should not be taken at face value. The ethos that so thoroughly brought women into all ranks of social and economic life was the result of state-ordered policies that reflected state interests, rather than the result of a grassroots, gradual development within civil society that might have reflected women's perceptions of their own interests. Consequently, Soviet women never raised a challenge to their traditional household role or responsibilities and routinely found themselves under the double-burden of being a productive worker as well as a traditional wife/mother. The personal never became political.

Moreover, while women were emancipated from male domination by the egalitarian ideology of the Communist state, women, as well as men, were de facto exploited and dominated by the state. As Olga Voronina noted, it was the Soviet women's labor "that held up the extensive economy for many long years at a low cost" (Voronina, 1993, 101).

This situation, of course, created within the Communist societies a gender context and gender agencies that were quite different from Western ones. There was virtually no "little housewife of the 50s". Instead, there was a "super-woman" of the 50s (as well as "super-women" of later decades) desperately trying to combine all the roles, to be it all, to do it all and to do it well. Women did not suffer from "the problem that has no name." It was easy to name their problems: Being overworked, underpaid and overwhelmed. For an illustration of

the differences between women's concerns in the Communist and liberal worlds of that period, it is interesting (telling) that in the mid-60s, when Betty Friedan's Feminine Mystique was shaping the future of women's issues in the U.S., a very different writing about Soviet women's lives became popular in the USSR. It was Natalia Baranskaya's novel, A Regular Week, depicting the typical life of an average Soviet woman, stretched thin between work and family. Women could recognize themselves and their situations in the life of that heroine.

In other words, there was no social context for the rise of a Communist Betty Friedan or Simone de Beauvoir, who would successfully advocate women's emancipation **from male domination**. Males and females alike felt dominated by the totalitarian state. Moreover, some researchers (Kirczkova and Farkasova, 1993; Havelkova, 1993 a, b) consider that many women in the Communist countries were frequently nostalgic for the security and flexibility (or facility) of a traditional woman's role, with its agency defined by the leeway of the privacy of family life. As Dasa Duhacek indicated, "The family is almost seen as the site of the public, or at least its compensation, its supplement, which is a reversal of the Western feminist theoretical designation." (Duhacek, 2000, 131 -132). Hana Havelkova depicted the situation the following way: "Because the family remained the last bastion of freedom, it took over many of the former functions of the public sphere." (Havelkova, 1993 b, 92).

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No wonder that with the beginning of Gorbachev's liberalization and "perestroika" women's issues were not a part of the general discourse of liberation. Women felt that liberation was needed from the Communist state, and their situation would improve simply as a consequence of overall democratization. Within the societal reaction against everything Communist, a discourse of return to the "natural role of women" became quite popular in late Soviet – early post-Soviet democratic dialogue. This situation was well depicted by Nadezhda Agzhikina, the co-President of the Russian Association of Journalists. She wrote:

"Overall, in the discussions of "perestroika" there was almost no "women's topic"... The dissident thought, which reigned for a while, did not accept the discussion of women's issues. Women themselves, following the democratic press of that period, were saying that they would better let men rule. The discussion of power gradually became more and more "masculine".

"Mikhail Gorbachev played an interesting role in this process. In many of his speeches he accentuated a thought that was popular among the intelligentsia: That a woman should be "liberated", by being given more opportunity to stay home. I am sure that he meant, first of all, giving a woman the right of choice between staying home and having a career. However, the democratic press, unaccustomed to pluralism, started to propagate the image of a pretty housewife... not burdened by a profession and a job. Needless to say, there were virtually no such women in the USSR, for the reason of the mandatory placing in a job as well as the low wages of men." (Agzhikina, 2000, 5-6).

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The Discursive Practices of Western Feminists in the Soviet Space
– Some Observations of a Local Participant

Many of the differences between women's lives in the ex-Communist and capitalist countries have, of course, long been a matter of interest in the West. However, there has been a transformation of the dominant western perceptions of those differences. In the beginning of the Soviet period the Communist theory of gender relations seemed to be accepted by the West at its face value. After all, a big part of Western feminist theory itself (Marxist and Socialist feminism) was inspired by and formed after the women's liberation model *a'la* Engels, Bebel and Alexandra Kollontai. Later, however, more accurate information about the difficulties of the real life of women under Communism became widely available in the West. So, when the Iron Curtain fell, the natural reaction of Western feminists was to offer help to their sisters on the other side. The generic recipes emphasized resistance to male domination.

The ex-Soviets encounters with Western feminists started as ambivalent and were rather difficult. On the one hand, the message of the necessity to improve the lives of women seemed clear and appealing to the majority of post-Soviet women. That was logical, given the difficult conditions under which most of them lived during and immediately after the Soviet period. However, the generic feminist language of the traditional repression of women and the encouragement of the manifest defiance of male domination seemed rather irrelevant and even suspicious. The discourse of repression and resistance sounded too similar to the discredited Marxist paradigm, and at the same time too foreign.

This reaction also appears quite logical given the historical and political contextualization of the Soviet women's lives discussed above. In other words, the main source of disagreement was not the moral of empowering women but the modes of agency used in the process.

The inevitable stresses between the viewpoints of Western feminist-activists and former Soviet women became evident in various Women's Leadership and other workshops that were held in the former Soviet and East European states in mid-1990s and later. The logical remedy for the "clash of cultures" could have been a more open discussion within the interested women's communities in order to reveal the different discursive traditions of the participants of those workshops. However, the very atmosphere of those workshops did not encourage such a discussion.

For the Western participants, the politically prescriptive project of women's liberation interfered with the analytic project of better understanding their interlocutors. The Westerners seemed driven mainly by their mission to enlighten and reform their abject counterparts, so the latter could live freer lives. The ex-Soviet participants, in their turn, did not really insist on making themselves heard and understood better. On the one hand, they did not feel very secure, particularly as they were trying to adjust to the new situation of those workshops, which were as unfamiliar in their structure as in their content. On the other hand, being trained for years by the Communist authorities to adjust to objectionable conditions rather than to try to change them, many of the ex-Soviet participants treated the language of feminism as just "another language" in which one had to "speak" in order to get Western

grants and other benefits. In terms of the Habermasian model of analysis, those sorts of discursive practice constituted a distortion of communication and a breakdown of inter-subjective dialogue, with both sides treating each other as objects.

Beyond the Communist World

Such patterns of communication don't seem to be limited to the interchange between the ex-Communist and Western women's groups. Indeed, they appear as rather common modes of interaction between the women's groups of the North vice the South. Excellent explorations and analyses of North-South women's interactions have been done by Allison Jaggar (Jaggar, 2000), Ann Fergusson (Ferguson, 2000), Saba Mahmood (Mahmood, 2005) (Tayaab, 2000). There is even a term "Western patriarchal feminism" contrived by Azizah Y. Al-Hibri to define "the perspective of the dominant cultural 'I' " employed by the Western feminists' hegemonic discourse (Al-Hibri, 1999, 41).

Usually authors concerned with the issues of West-East or North-South feminist interaction are concerned about the "missionary" attitude displayed by the Western or Northern women toward their Eastern or Southern counterparts. In other words, if we use Habermasian terms, there is a rather large amount of literature that states that Southern women are being de-subjectivized and treated as objects in the works of their Northern counterparts. This paper makes a point that the "objectivization" of "the Other" participants is actually happening *both* ways during the North-South women's groups' interaction, with different agencies ascribed to the counterparts.

These distorted patterns of communication clearly cannot suffice either to foster intercultural women's cooperation or to rally local female support behind the democratization of their countries. Moreover, the situation is often complicated by the difficult process of democratization, all the hardships of transition, as well as Track 1 political entanglements.

The Hardships of Transition – Post Soviet Experience

There are clear statistics that show that in the former USSR the situation of women deteriorated significantly after the fall of Communism. The official data of unemployment in Russia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union shows that more than 74% of the registered unemployed in 2000 were women. (See [Agzhikina, 2000, 8](#)). Moreover, as Nadegda [Agzhikina](#) argued, if in the Soviet time the average wage of women constituted around 70% of that of men, by the year 2000 it dropped to a mere 45% of the male wage in Russia ([Agzhikina, 2000, 8](#)).

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To help women cope with the hardships that have been visited upon them since the collapse of Communism, a large number of women's organizations have developed in the post-Soviet space. Their structures are usually modeled after Western patterns, as are the sets of issues with which they are ostensibly concerned. Those issues flow mainly from the ethos of the Western, not the ex-Soviet, women's discourse. The main reason for the existence of most women's organizations, despite their non-profit status, seems to be the solicitation of

Western grants, other forms of support and various benefits (e.g. increased access to information, education, travel, jobs and contacts).

Of course, many of these organizations are doing genuinely good deeds through their programs; however their choice and design of programs is more determined by and tailored after the Western foundations' preferences, rather than authentic local needs and demands. These women's organizations are usually quite elitist, with their members almost necessarily proficient in English and usually having some academic or bureaucratic background. The choice of members is also understandable given that they need to be able to write competitive grant proposals in a foreign language and within an alien ethos.

At the same time, within a large strata of women in post-Communist societies there is a widespread perception that feminism is a manifestation of the Western female mindset which propagates "the battle of the sexes." And this message does not seem to be appealing to the average woman of those societies. The roots of popular anti-feminism in post-Communist societies has been analyzed by a number of local researchers, among them Siklova, Bollobas, Adamik and others (Silkova, 1993, Bollobas, 1993, Adamik, 1993). One of those roots seems to be associated with the failure of democratization per se to improve the life of women.

Transition Problems in Muslim Societies

As mentioned above, the situation just described is not unique to the former Communist space. Similar processes are taking place in the current "democratization" of Muslim societies. For example, the Bush Administrations dubious characterization of the Afghan war as being, in part, for "women's liberation" is not necessarily seen that way in Afghanistan. As Saba Mahmood argues:

"The reports from Afghanistan increasingly suggest that the lives of Afghan women have not improved since the ouster of the Taliban and that, if anything, life on the streets has become more unsafe than it was under the old regime due to conditions of increased socio-political instability (Amnesty International 2003; Badkhen 2002; Human Rights Watch 2002)." (Mahmood, 197).

Achievements (if any) in Iraq in terms of women's liberation seem to be even more questionable. Numerous reports suggest that women's conditions and real liberty have actually deteriorated since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, due both to the general insecurity in the country as well to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Discussing concerns for women's rights in connection with the upcoming new Iraqi constitution, Mitchell Prothero has compared the situation of women under Saddam's regime and now. He argues that during the old regime:

"Iraqi women had access to education, the ability to refuse arranged marriages, and the right to full inheritance; their testimony counted in courts; and they had a fighting chance to keep custody of their children if divorced or widowed. Islamic family law would change these rights, and not to women's advantage. Activists say that, judging

from drafts of the constitution revealed so far, a woman's right to a divorce without her husband's consent, custody of male children past a certain age, and inheritance would be diminished, and she would no longer be considered to be equal to a man in the law's eyes" (Prothero, 2005).

In addition to the doubtful nature of women's liberation through the real-life process of democratization, Western feminism's patterns and generic feminist messages are being perceived as alien within the Muslim societies. Muslim societies also seem to be striving to produce their own meanings of the issues. There is a body of literature discussing the discourse on the interpretation of the role of women in Islam and Islamic feminism (see Jaywardena, 1986; Mahmood, 2005; Tayyab, 2000).

Obviously, the Islamic ethos is different from the post-Communist one. Interestingly, however, just as in the post-Communist case, the Western feminist message is being perceived in Muslim societies more as a tool of Westernization or Western domination than as an agency of women's liberation. Basharat Tayyab, a professor of philosophy from the University of Pakistan, even offered "a word of caution for the Islamic feminist movements". She argued, that "they need to guard against the dangers of confusing the real feminist issues with those of Westernization. It is the element of Westernization, when confused with feminism, which causes reaction amongst the more conservative elements of Muslim society. The real feminist perspective, however, needs to be highlighted so as to lend vitality and meaning to Muslim feminism" (Tayyab, 2000, 244)

The Trap of the Political Project of Western Feminism

As indicated above, one finds similar patterns vis-a'-vis global feminism in a variety of different, non-Western, cultural contexts. On the one hand, there is a growing globalization of the women's movement, with ever strengthening ties among the transnational women's organizations. As Amrita Basu has argued,

"The international women's conferences that occurred in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980) Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) provide a fruitful opportunity to explore the changing relationship among women's organizations transnationally. The two-tier system of conferences, namely the United Nations-convened official conferences of the heads of states, and the non-governmental conferences convened by women's groups and movements, provide insight into the workings of the international state system and of what some describe as a burgeoning civil society" (Basu, 2003, 69)

On the other hand, women's movements in non-Western societies are usually elitist, confined to Western models and alienated from the grass roots' base of historically and politically contextualized epistemology shared by the majority of women in their societies. In other words, despite all the global feminist networks and conferences, the situation within the women's community (as an ideal feminist project) could hardly be further from the motto of global sisterhood proclaimed in the 1970s. In this situation, is it any wonder that the Western idea of women's liberation through democratization does not enjoy much popularity among

the majority of non-Western women? Imported democratization more often than not seems to connote domination and imperialism rather than sisterhood. The feminist message associated with such democratization may similarly be read as an agency of subjugation and control.

In a sense, we are in a paradoxical situation, wherein the political project of feminism is itself being caught in a trap of power relationships, subordination and domination. It was that very narration, and resistance to it, which historically brought feminism into existence! In other words, it looks as though, in today's feminism, the problem of *Woman as Other* is being increasingly complemented by the problem of *the Other Woman*.

It is no wonder that in this situation – where attempts at democratization per se have not brought any improvement in women's issues and local feminist discourse has been structured on a foreign ethos – the political project of feminism has encountered widespread misunderstanding and disbelief.

Empirical Implications of Deliberative Democracy

The thesis of this paper is that in order to remedy the widespread misunderstanding and/or disagreement of non-Western women with the American promotion of women's rights, greater attention to the development, refinement and theory of the process of cross-cultural, international women's discourse is required. In this regard, such discourse may be improved through the application of the theory of deliberative democracy and its discourse ethics.

Our proposal for feminist utilization of discourse ethics for intra-gender problem solving draws heavily from the methodology used and findings produced by another empirically oriented academic field, namely the field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. In particular, our model takes the theory-based practical methodology developed in Conflict Studies, known as the Interactive Problem Solving Approach, and tries to adjust it for Women's Studies. The approach was initiated in the works of John Burton and further developed and established in a number of university-based Centers and Institutes, the leading one among them being the Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution (PICAR) at Harvard's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. Herbert Kelman, the main architect of the problem-solving approach and the former Director of PICAR (1993-2003) describes the approach as “an unofficial, academically based, third-party approach to the analysis and resolution of international and inter-communal conflicts” (Kelman, 2000, 273).

While based on PICAR's problem-solving approach, the women's dialog version would have some different features. Most of the differences will be indicated later in the discussion of the workshop model, but three of the most systemically distinct features need immediate attention. First, unlike Kelman's workshops, which were based on the original theory developed within the problem-solving approach itself, the feminist version, at least in its early stages, would use problem-solving techniques for implementing some other preexisting theories, particularly the theory of communicative action. Second, unlike conflict resolution's version of the approach, which clearly indicates a strong third-party role, the women's issues version would have no third party. The feminist scholar-practitioners would

constitute one side of a deliberation, and the non-Western, Other women would constitute the second side. Third, the problem-solving approach would be used primarily to promote interlocution and deliberation over different definitions and meanings of women's issues held by different women within distinct contexts of their specific life-worlds; i.e., the approach is not intended to be used in international women's workshops as a means to address any given, generic or predetermined issue solely on the agenda of Western feminists.

This proposed model relies mainly on the Habermasian version of deliberative democracy with its communicative action, but also includes some of the further development of the theory of deliberative democracy, particularly in the works of feminist authors. Thus, in some aspects we are going to look to re-direct some of the findings and insights of feminism from the interpretation of the inter-gendered world toward the intra-gender one. This "feminization" of the discussion is logically compelling, as the agents of the discourse in question are women!

Solving Inter-Group Problems

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Let me comment on the organization of the rest of this sub-chapter. The methodological aim is to come as close as possible to a direct discourse between (1) deliberative democracy and (2) conflict resolution techniques. To achieve this aim I try to minimize analytic and interpretive interruptions and maximize an uninterrupted, direct interaction of the texts and techniques. The technique I will employ is akin to the direct speech of a drama or stage play, rather than the intermediated speech of a narration. In other words, this is an attempt to use *the structure of a discourse* in order to reveal directly the theoretical compatibility and commonality of deliberative democracy's theory of communicative action and conflict resolution's problem-solving approach. Then we will look at particular forms of problem-solving techniques and some other findings from the field of conflict resolution for the empirical implementation of communicative action and its discourse ethics in the cause of women's issues.

The Discourse:

- (1) – Discourse Ethics Theorists Speaking...
- (2) – A Conflict Resolution Scholar Speaking...

A. About the Role and Forms of Deliberation in Solving the Inter-group Problems

1. Simone Chambers: "Discourse ethics replaces the image of public debate as a marketplace of ideas between elites in which interests and understandings compete with each other for domination with the idea of public debate as a democratized forum in which we cooperatively construct common understandings and work through our differences. Part of this transformation can take place by opening up opportunities to participate, by including excluded voices..." (Chambers, 1995, 176)

2. Herbert C. Kelman: “We are trying to encourage the participants to focus on each other, rather than on their constituencies, on an audience, on third party, or on the record: *to listen to the other, with the aim of understanding the other’s perspective, and to talk to the other, with the aim of making their own perspective understood.* We want them to think out loud, to experiment with the ideas, to explore different options...Focusing on each other enables and encourages the participants to engage in a type of discussion that is generally not feasible among parties embroiled in a bitter conflict – a type of discussion that, indeed, deviates from the conflict norms that usually govern their behavior.” (Kelman, 2000, 275 - 276)

B. About the Analytic Character and Inclusiveness of the Reflexive Form of Communication

1. Jurgen Habermas: “...How can the transition to a post-traditional morality as such be justified? Traditionally established obligations rooted in communicative action do not of themselves reach beyond the limits of family, the tribe, the city, or the nation. However, the reflexive form of communicative action behaves differently: Argumentation of its very nature points beyond all particular forms of life. For in the pragmatic presuppositions of rational discourse or deliberation the normative content of the implicit assumptions of communicative action is generalized, abstracted and freed from all limits – the practice of deliberation is extended to an inclusive community that does not in principle exclude any subject capable of speech and action who can make relevant contribution.” (Habermas, 1999, 40-41)
2. Herbert Kelman: “Analytic discussion helps the parties to move to a problem-solving mode of interaction, in contrast to the adversarial mode that usually characterizes conflict interactions. The participants are asked to *take the conflict as a shared problem* that requires joint effort to find a mutually satisfactory solution.” (Kelman, 2000, 276)

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C. About the Importance and Reservations of Equality in Communication

1. Jurgen Habermas: “... A universalistic conception that wants to avoid false abstractions must draw on insights from the theory of communication. From the fact that persons can only be individuated through socialization it follows that moral concern is owed equally to persons both as irreplaceable individuals and as members of the community, and hence it connects justice with solidarity. Equal treatment means equal treatment of unequals who are nonetheless aware of their interdependence. Moral universalism must not take into account the aspect of equality – the fact that persons as such are equal to all other persons – at the expense of the aspect of individuality – the fact that as individuals they are at the same time absolutely different from all others. The equal respect for everyone else demanded by a moral universalism sensitive to difference thus takes the form of a nonleveling and nonappropriating inclusion of the other in his otherness” (Habermas, 1999, 40)

2. Herbert Kelman: "... Within the workshop setting, the two parties are equals. Asymmetries in power, moral position, or reputation clearly play an important role in the conflict and must be taken into account in the workshop discussions. But the two parties are equals in the workshop setting in the sense that each party has the same right to serious consideration of its needs, fears and concerns. Within the rules of the workshop Israeli participants cannot dismiss Palestinian concerns on the grounds that Palestinians are the weaker party and, therefore in a poor bargaining position; nor can Palestinian participants dismiss Israeli concerns on the grounds that the Israelis are oppressors and, therefore, not entitled to sympathy. Each side has the right to be heard in the workshop and each side's needs and fears must be given equal attention in the search for a mutually satisfactory solution" (Kelman, 2000, 276)

This "first person interaction" between the scholars of deliberative democracy's discourse ethics and the scholars of conflict resolution could be continued. The bottom line of this display of quotations, however, is to show that there are some parallels and similarities between discourse ethics and conflict resolution, as displayed in (but not limited to) their views on the role and form of deliberation in solving inter-group problems, on the analytic character and inclusiveness of the reflexive form of communication, and on the importance and reservations of equality in communication - to name just a few. Following the above statements, which elucidate parallels and similarities between the theories and approaches, let us consider the possible use of Conflict Resolution's techniques of implementing theoretical findings for the design of better ways of implementing theories in feminism (including feminism's adaptation of the theory of communicative action).

Feminism, Communicative Action and Conflict Resolution Theory

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We now have three analytic phenomena that have some parallels and similarities: (1) Feminism, (2) the theory of communicative action and (3) the field of conflict resolution. Two of them (feminism and conflict resolution) are "Janus faced" with double, theory-practice incarnations or embodiments. The third one (the theory of communicative action) is actually a theory of action or a theory of practice. As the words theory and practice are key for all three phenomena, let us look at the theory-practice disposition within each of them.

1. Feminism

Feminism as a practical project of advocacy of women's rights on the basis of gender equality appears to have rather limited connections to the dynamic body of intellectually sophisticated feminist theory that is rapidly developing within academia. In particular, the insights of feminist scholarship on the diversity of women's perspectives in the contemporary, post colonial and globalized world are not widely represented in the un-revised practices of feminist activism. In the process of communicating the message of women's liberation, feminist practices seem overly concerned with the content of the message per se, to the detriment of the process of communication. As already discussed, this type of practice, which ignores the findings of its respective theory, is rather unfortunate, as it ends up damaging the successful communication of the feminist message itself.

2. The Theory of Communicative Action

The theory of communicative action, as described by Habermas, is a “theory of *action* that...is concerned to project an ideal communication community.” (Habermas, 1985 b, 2; emphasis added). This description, as well as the very name of the thesis, clearly asserts the practical, action-oriented character of it.¹ That said, Habermas does not offer any actual agency of communicative action. Even more, he acknowledges the limitations of explaining the forms and norms of society as a whole in terms of communicative rationality. However, when he focuses upon distinct societal groups, he argues that, “we can explain the symbolic reproduction of a lifeworld of a social group in this way [i.e. in terms of communicative rationality], if we approach the matter from an internal perspective.” (Habermas, 1985 b, 2; insert added)

The bottom line for this paper is that the theory of communicative action with its discourse ethics appears to be practically applicable to intra-gender discourse. We can assume it because one of the main principles of feminism is that women are a distinct social group, and a particular project of this paper is concerned with the internal perspective of this group. At the same time, the actual practices of communicative action and the implementation of discourse ethics have to be *imagined and developed* on the basis of Habermas’ writings, as they cannot be *found* in those writings.

3. Conflict Analysis and Resolution

The field of conflict analysis and resolution provides the closest and clearest model of interdependence and interconnectedness between theory and practice. These features are especially evident in the development and expansion of the influential and popular “interactive problem-solving approach” to conflict resolution. The connection between academic theory and practice within that approach is elucidated by Herbert Kelman. “Interaction problem solving is an approach to the resolution of international conflicts that explicitly follows a scholar-practitioner model: *Our form of practice is part and parcel of our role as academically based scholars.*” (emphasis added) (Kelman, 2000, 283)

Kelman’s approach utilizes interactive workshops that promote a free exchange of ideas in order for participants to better understand and “penetrate each other’s perspectives.” The approach, “assumes that the products of social interaction are emergent, that is, they only emerge over the course...of social interaction.” (Kreuger, 2005)

¹ The term *ideal* in the phrase “ideal communication community” does not connote something which is not “real.” To understand Habermas’ meaning of “ideal”, consider the following quotation: “It’s really quite simple: Whenever we mean what we say, we raise the claim that what we said is true, or right, or truthful. With this claim, a small bit of ideality breaks into our everyday lives, because such validity can in the end be resolved only with arguments.” (Habermas, 1994, 102)

In short, the field of conflict analysis and resolution, with its problem solving approach, has a much more developed theory-practice connection than either feminism or deliberative democracy. Given the similarities between the perspectives of the problem solving approach and communicative action on the one hand and parallels between feminism and conflict resolution of the other, let us now see if some of the techniques, structures, methods and other practical features of problem-solving workshops could be helpful in designing feminist workshops more conducive to solving problems of intra-gender, cross-cultural, female communication.

The Feminist Workshop Project **Coordinating the Macro-Purpose and Micro-Process**

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The Kelman Model

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The macro-purpose of the women's workshop model that will be outlined below is to promote freedom and mutual understanding within the globalized women's community, through inter-subjective, communicative, action exercises. The micro-process of the exercise will be modeled after the conflict-resolution, problem-solving workshops designed and run by Herbert Kelman. He writes:

“Since problem-solving workshops are at the heart of our practice of interactive problem solving, I shall try to give a brief description of what they entail and what they are designed to accomplish. I shall describe a typical ‘one-time’ workshop for Israeli and Palestinian participants. By ‘one-time’ I mean that this particular group of Israelis and Palestinians convenes only for this one occasion. Some of the individuals have participated in more than one such workshop, and *the one-time workshops that we have held over the years have had a cumulative effect within the two societies.*” (emphasis added) (Kelman 2000, 274)

While particular groups of individuals might get together only once for a particular (or one-time) workshop, the organizers of conflict-resolution workshops often run a series of workshops covering the same material or topics, so that as many groups and individuals as possible can benefit from the workshop experience. Organizers may, over a number of months or years, also run workshops that cover a variety of issues, so that individuals and groups who have participated in earlier workshops may at times be included in new groupings for later workshops.

Were women to organize similar workshops that maximized both the number of participants and the intra-gender dialogue of those participants, they might well have an influence on mass public opinion and generate strong cumulative effects on their respective societies. And there is no necessary reason, other than perhaps financial constraints, to limit workshops to one-time affairs. After 1990, Kelman's group started to hold continuous Israeli-Palestinian workshops for the same participants. The latter structure seemed to have had deeper and longer lasting effects.

The participants of Kelman's workshop were Israelis and Palestinians. Obviously, the nationality of the participants in a conflict resolution workshop is determined by the general goal of RESOLUTION of a CONFLICT. So, identification of a conflict between communities or countries determines the nationalities of the workshop participants. To determine which particular individuals would be best to involve in a workshop, Kelman wrote:

"The Israeli and Palestinian participants are politically involved and often influential members of their societies, but – with some exceptions – they are not officials. They may be parliamentarians, leaders and activists of political parties or political movements, journalists, editors, directors of think tanks, or politically involved academicians – i.e., scholars who serve as advisers to political leaders, and some of whom move back and forth between government and academia." (Kelman, 2000, 275; italics added).

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The choice of high level or influential participants, again, was determined by the general purpose of *conflict resolution*. The participants, if in most cases not officials, were still be able to influence official diplomacy, for the obvious reason that conflict resolution generally requires the signing of an official peace treaty or agreement.

A Women's Workshop Model

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For our purposes the process of the selection of participants' nationalities should be determined by our general goal, namely the goal of facilitating communication between Western and non-Western women. Obviously, the main requirement should be representation of women from the North and South or the West and the Rest. The selection of participants from specific countries is probably of secondary significance.

Over time, of course, ordinary and diverse women from more and more countries and cultures would, hopefully, become involved in the dialogues, thus broadening the extent of the "practical discourses" among women.

In determining what type of women should represent Western and non-Western cultures in women's workshops, one must be cautious. One must keep in mind that among the goals of such workshops are the broadening of "practical discourses" and the improvement of communication between Western and non-Western women. These goals would seem to demand that non-Western participants would generally or often have two characteristics or requirements:

Requirement of ordinariness. Participants should not be officials or have close-to-official status. There is a tendency of elitist, non-Western participants to "objectify" their Western counterparts through the appropriation of their Western "language" and their ethos. While ostensibly promoting harmony within a workshop, this type of elitist objectification and pandering constitutes a distortion or even a breakdown of genuine communication. It ruins the intended purpose of a workshop, as an exercise in communicative action, that "presupposes the use of language as a medium for a kind of reaching understanding, in the course of which participants, through relating to

a world, reciprocally raise validity claims the can be accepted or contested.”
(Habermas, 1985 a, 99)

Requirement of diversity. Participants should come from as diverse paths in life as possible, so that the new understandings (of others as well as themselves) reached through the workshop’s deliberations can be shared, distributed and disseminated widely throughout their societies, to diverse groups of women, and thus promote the goal of better intra-gender understanding.

Just as the issue of participants’ selection is highly important for the meta-process of a conflict resolution workshop, so too it is critical for a feminist workshop, even though the criteria for the participants’ selection are very different for the two fields. There are some issues of particular importance in the design of a communicative workshop for women’s issues that are less important to a conflict resolution exercise. For example, in the design of a women’s workshop, special attention is required to the mini-process of selecting adequate forms of participation. Let me explain. In preparation for a workshop in most fields, the conveners usually identify the societal need to be addressed by the workshop, then set the particular agenda and the structure of the workshop, as well as the “beneficiaries” of it. The so called beneficiaries are generally the actual participants of a workshop, and they are assigned a role of rather passive recipients of benefits.

In other words, this process is largely based on the traditional subject/object relationship, where subjects (the conveners) relate to objects (the participant-beneficiaries). This disproportional arrangement should not be used in a discourse-ethics based workshop (including the women’s issue workshop model in question) because it contradicts the very core of discourse ethics, which “defends the morality of equal respect and solidaristic responsibility for everybody.” (Habermas, 1999, .39)

The equality of respect and responsibility needs to be translated into the equality of participation. How would the latter look in practice? It appears that the only “moment of inequality” between the Western (or pro-Western) organizers of workshops and representative, non-Western participants which is actually important to preserve occurs at the time of the initial participant selection. Given the need to assure the selection of participants in accordance with the requirements of ordinariness and diversity, discussed above, some direction from the organizers (or Westerners) appears necessary. Leaving the selection of non-Western participants unregulated would almost positively result in an overwhelming participation of elitist, pro-active, pro-Western activists, the self appointed (often misleading) representatives of the muted voices in their cultures.

Clearly, after actively seeking out the participants who satisfy the criteria, only scrupulous attendance to the practicalities of parity will assure a real equality of discourse within a workshop. In real life, the principle of parity would be expressed in the language of content and structure. In other words, the main questions that all the participants should ask themselves and decide upon are the questions of what to discuss and how to equitably structure the discussion to assure that genuine issues germane to all concerned (not just pre-set issues of Westerners) are addressed.

Content: Topics for Discussion and the Problem of the Subaltern

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The question of what to discuss may seem relatively simple, if not insignificant. The classical feminist answer would be that most any topic related to the agency of gender equality would be relevant. However, one should not forget that the interlocutors of the feminists in the workshop in question are supposed to be the “mute ones,” the subalterns of the feminist and patriarchal discourses alike, so eloquently described in the famous essay of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Addressing the “silence” and the obscured subjectivity of the “subaltern” women of the third world (for example, the Indian widows “practicing” *sati*) Spivak concludes that the subaltern does not speak for herself in explaining her identity, because she “cannot know or speak the text of female exploitation.” (Spivak, 1988, 288)

Spivak’s assertion, however, has raised questions. As Alison M. Jaggar puts it,

“Perhaps this is Spivak’s rhetorical way of saying that her indigenous language is incomprehensible to intellectuals or that she cannot produce ‘texts’ because she is illiterate. But why can’t she even know about her exploitation? Even if she is unfamiliar with classic texts of exploitation, such as Marxism, surely she must be aware that something is wrong with her situation. How can she be content in her oppression?” (Jaggar, 2000, 6)

The proposed workshops might reduce the guessing about the “subaltern’s” identity by letting her identify the text she chooses to speak, rather than expecting her to speak the generic text of female exploitation. Even though this “other woman’s” speech might be (and obviously would be) very different from ours, it would still be useful, for the promotion of understanding, to treat it as a discourse in itself, rather than as either an expression of internalized patriarchy or the principally inexpressible materiality of the “other woman’s” life-world.

An excellent exploration of “the other” practices as an expression of another discourse is offered in Saba Mahmood’s *Politics of Piety* (2005). The book analyzes “some of the conceptual challenges that women’s involvement in the Islamist movement poses to feminist theory, in particular, and to secular liberal thought, in general, through the ethnographic account of an urban woman’s mosque movement that is part of the larger Islamic revival in Cairo, Egypt.” (Mahmood, 2005, 2) Through her analysis of the practices and discussions of the women participants of the mosque movement, Mahmood comes to the conclusion that, “The mosque women’s practices of modesty and femininity do not signify the abjectness of the feminine within Islamic discourse, but articulate a positive and immanent discourse of being in the world.” (Mahmood, 2005, 160)

Content: A Liberal, Open-ended Approach to Topics

Returning to our model workshop, if it is to provide a practical setting for inter-subjective, inclusive and egalitarian dialogue between the Western feminist discourse and

other discourses (e.g. Mahmood's mosque movement) it should consistently exercise the Habermasian principle of, "a *non-leveling* and *non-appropriating* inclusion of the Other in his [or rather her] *otherness*." (Habermas, 1999, 40) That means that the topic of discussion is likely to be outside of the feminist discourse of resistance to exploitation and within some other discourses. For example, one can speculate that if the non-Western participants of a workshop were to be recruited from the members of Mahmood's mosque movement, the topic of discussion chosen by them could well be the meaning of modesty and femininity, or something like that. Were the participants a group of ex-Communist women, chances are high that, given a choice, they would discuss something like non-confrontational means for achieving the ends of gender emancipation. Whatever the exact topics that might be *freely* chosen by non-Western participants, the point is that the subaltern can speak – even if her speech does not consist of the "text of female exploitation!"

Let the non-Western woman speak her own text and defend her own position! Let us listen and understand her, as in Kelman's problem solving workshops, where each side is encouraged to, "discuss its central concerns in the conflict – the fundamental needs that would have to be addressed and the existential fears that would have to be allayed if a solution is to be satisfactory to them. ... The purpose is for each side to gain an adequate understanding of the other's needs, fears and concerns from the other's perspective." (Kelman, 2000, 277) This simple technique might bring the international women's discourse closer to the Habermasian ideal of undistorted communication and, thereby, to solving the problem of mutual understanding (or misunderstanding) between feminists and the global *Other* women.

Modalities of Discussion: The Importance of the Setting

During a feminist discourse workshop it is not just the authorship of the topics of discussion, but also the manner in which the actual location, structure and physical arrangements of the workshop are determined that may bear significance for the workshop's results. That is to say, a women's workshop, just by its gender specifics, goes beyond the original Habermasian idea of justice and rationality and includes the agency of care and affection. So, a women's discourse is more likely than not to be not only a *practical* discourse (Chambers, 1995), but also a *passionate* discourse. That means that emotional security and attachments of the participants, especially the non-Western participants are factors to be reckoned with.

During a workshop the participants endure the difficult task of rationally justifying to impartial outsiders the logic and passion of the norms and ideas that are significant for their authentic life-worlds. This ambitious enterprise has a better chance to succeed and is easier to perform if it is conducted in a setting appropriate for the norms and the mindsets revealed. The sterile environment of a classroom or a conference room may constitute a dissonance with the body of some narratives and even connote the meaning of the Western tutelage of the "subalterns", and that would contradict the principle of equality which is essential for both deliberative democracy and the problem-solving approach alike. That is why the choice of the setting and the place is almost as important as the topic for the productivity of a workshop.

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The selection of venue would be both more accurate and more legitimate if the non-Western participants were actually active subjects rather than passive recipients of those selections. One can imagine a diversity of customized settings produced by such an approach, and some of those settings may seem quite counterintuitive to Western perceptions. For example, a group of Russian or other ex-Soviet women might well choose a late night discussions in the kitchen as their discursive setting. This seemingly awkward choice could, however, reflect the embedded social practices and past experiences of the participants. A good explanation of the symbolical meaning of *the kitchen* for former Soviet women is offered by Larissa Lissyutkina:

“The house, and especially the kitchen, in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s was the only free space. In Russia, to aspire to the kitchen does not have the same connotation as in the West. The Russian kitchen was a front of massive resistance to the totalitarian regime and is perceived with sentimental nostalgia today. Here, for the first time in post-revolutionary history, an alternative lifestyle for many Soviet people was formed. Women, who after the beginning of perestroika demanded the right to return to the kitchen, to the family and to the home, were not only tired from the lack of home life and the senseless expenditure of energy in the workplace, but also feared handing over rearing of their children to the community organizations and teachers. Most importantly, they by no means perceived their kitchen, which is rarely larger than five square meters, as a narrow corridor cut off from the world. Here, heated arguments about culture and politics take place. From here people go directly to huge meetings in the square with banners and placards. In the kitchen one is surrounded by intimacy, publicity, and intellectual creativity.” (Lissyutkina, 1993, 276)

From the above, it appears very logical that a kitchen, as a space of creative and free communication, could be chosen by some ex-Communist women as a location for their communicative action exercise! One can also speculate that a group of Muslim women, e.g., Mahmood’s mosque movement’s participants, could choose a mosque or some similar environment for their deliberations during the workshop.

Thus, a women’s workshop might be intentionally designed for a flexible rather than a fixed location. In addition to a workshop’s encouragement to “think out loud, to experiment with ideas, to explore different options” (Kelman, 2000, 275) women’s workshops’ participants could also be encouraged to experiment with and explore different locations, arrangements and settings.

It is the scrupulous attendance to the principle of equality in uniqueness during the workshop, and the practical exercising of the Habermasian “equality of unequals”, as embodied in the synergy of agencies of content and structure, which are supposed to create more self-expressive presentation, and thus promote better understanding and even self-understanding among the participants.

As one can see, the model women’s problem-solving workshop described above differs in many of its features from Kelman’s original workshop description. The differences are determined by the different contextualizations of the two workshops. The essential

commonality, however, is more in the spirit than in the letter of either model of the problem-solving approach. Namely it is in the spirit of deriving practices from a comprehensive theory and paying scrupulous attention to the specificity of the process of theory implementation.

Epilogue

As has been stated from the beginning of this paper, women's liberation is an important feature informing the current wave of democratization. By including women's liberation as a focal point and a criterion of success of the current "liberation through democratization" effort, the U.S. and its coalition are operating on the fine ground of the crossing point of at least four [comprehensive] phenomena: international relations, feminism, democracy and democratization. In addition to those four, there is a fifth phenomenon with which the coalition must deal: Conflicts in need of resolution. All stages of the U.S.-championed, aggressive "liberation through democratization" project are interlocked with the phenomenon of conflict. Not only has the project been triggered by a conflict (started on September 11, 2001), it has also proceeded through the Afghani and Iraqi wars. In the process of "liberating" Afghanistan and Iraq (and others through moral suasion and propaganda), the coalition has not only met the forces of local resistance to foreign control, it has also had to face both new and long-running, historic enmities, struggles and conflicts among local factions.

Of course, the phenomena that interlace with the current democratization attempt have different levels of significance, weight and standing. What the five phenomena have in common is that each intersects in the international meta-project of liberation (including women's liberation) through democratization. Each is in its turn a duopoly that combines projects and processes of dynamic political *practice* with rich, sophisticated and ever developing *theory*.

For the ambitious meta-project based on the interlacing of so many complex and diverse phenomena to succeed, it needs to meet quite a number of prerequisites. First, the meta-project needs to draw on the diversity and sophistication of theoretical and practical findings of all five of its base-components. Second, the chances of success of the integrative meta-project depend upon the level of internal cohesion, including the theory and practice of integration within each of the base components. Third, the meta-project cannot just be a sum total of its base components. It needs to harness their immanent synergy. The current wave of *democratization* needs to reflect the outlined (and surely many other) requirements in order for an ordinary man or a woman from the street of Baghdad, Kabul or even Damascus to see it as more than an imposition of *democratic* electoral procedures and/or the imposition of Western *feminism* on other life-worlds through *international conflict*, ranging from the military to the tacit forms of conflict.

Perhaps if we move toward a more comprehensive, synergetic and nuanced vision of how and what we are encountering in the Others of the world, somewhere along the road we will no longer have to search for the answer to the question of why so many of those who are being liberated (including women) resent and resist our liberation effort.

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