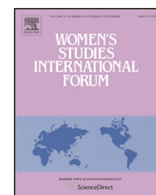
Women's Studies International Forum xxx (2017) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Women's Studies International Forum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif



Transnational feminisms and cosmopolitan feelings

Maree Pardy

Deakin University, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 31 October 2016
Received in revised form 13 May 2017
Accepted 23 May 2017
Available online xxxx

ABSTRACT

This article explores the feminist cosmopolitics of women's rights and solidarity campaigning, particularly those that focus on violence against women. I observe how in contrast to the mainstream theories of cosmopolitanism, feminist solidarity is an embodied cosmopolitics of emotion, affect and atmosphere. Emotion is an important register through which to examine feminist cosmopolitics: to not only demonstrate some of the successes and failures of such politics, but also to suggest that its inclusion in cosmopolitan literature might enable sharper attention to the contradictions that continue to plague the political credentials of cosmopolitanism.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Classical cosmopolitanism, broadly conceived as a politics of world citizenship based on an ethic of openness and hospitality, posits shared humanity as the platform for building a more peaceful and sustainable world. Recent cosmopolitan scholarship takes place at a much lower level of abstraction, finding opportunities to engage diversity, explore difference and examine acts of political solidarity. Less encumbered by the utopian aspiration of founding a global cosmopolis, "new" cosmopolitanisms represent what Eduardo Mendieta (2009) casts as the move from "imperial to dialogic cosmopolitanism." The claim here is that whereas Kantian cosmopolitanism both denies and dismisses its imperial origins, the recent grounded and reflective forms of "new" cosmopolitanism reject Eurocentrism, and stress instead the mutual engagement and transformation of self and other through cosmopolitan encounter (Beck, 2006; Fine, 2003; Robbins, 1998; Werbner, 2008). "Critical cosmopolitanism" shares a similar impulse to reject a universalising cosmopolitan narrative and reminds that colonialism, empire, slavery, capitalism and war are its products (Delanty, 2006; Prakash, 2014; Schiller & Irving, 2014). Nonetheless, the essential contradictions of its European origins continue to haunt cosmopolitan theory and politics.

Not withstanding the voluminous and burgeoning literature on cosmopolitanism, I begin here by noting two serious absences from its oeuvre. First, the peculiar absence of gender from cosmopolitan scholarship, even in the face of feminist global solidarity campaigns that resemble the kind of cosmopolitics that the new dialogic and critical approaches appear to advocate. Unlike cosmopolitanism, feminism has always been a project of both theory and political engagement. Cosmopolitan theorists therefore might have much to learn from analysing the transformations that have emerged through ongoing transnational feminist practice. Unlike cosmopolitanism, feminism's way of knowing, argues Ram (2006: 205) and is thus driven by an "existential urgency" (Ram, 2006: 206). Second, the politics and experience of emotions is also missing from the literature, even though the sorts of openness and conviviality advocated by the new cosmopolitanists occur in a field of emotion. Feminist transnational practice has been subject to constant internal critique and transformation and might be an example par excellence of the painful and emotional terrain that cosmopolitan politics and projects will face as they attempt to engage critically with current "plural and discrepant conditions" (Prakash, 2014).

Stivens (2008) discusses the remarkable gender absences in this body of work, also noting the feminist wariness about adopting cosmopolitanism as a frame for their work: as she suggests "…[P]ainful debates within recent women's movements about the proper path to gender justice and rights offer many lessons for the theoretical, political and moral projects of cosmopolitanisms" (2008: 89). Niamh Reilly reproaches the leading theorists of cosmopolitanism for a number of failings: they rarely highlight the gendered power dynamics at play in their abstractions or propositions; they elide feminist critiques of globalization and theorizing on cosmopolitanism; and, probably most importantly, in contrast to feminist movements, they largely avoid any discussion of the concrete global issues that their cosmopolitanism seeks to address (Reilly, 2007: 181). Building on these observations, I explore the feminist cosmopolitics of women's rights and solidarity campaigning, particularly those that focus on violence against women. I observe how, in contrast to mainstream theories of cosmopolitanism, feminist solidarity has presented as an engaged and embodied cosmopolitics of emotion, affect and atmosphere.[1] Emotion and affect, also the subject of an intellectual renaissance, are important registers through which to examine feminist cosmopolitics: to not only demonstrate some of the successes and failures of such politics, but also to suggest that its inclusion in the cosmopolitanism literature might enable sharper

E-mail address: maree.pardy@deakin.edu.au.

[1] See Masumi (1987) for a discussion of the difference and relations between feeling, affect, sensation and emotion.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.05.005
0277-5395/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article as: Pardy, M., Transnational feminisms and cosmopolitan feelings, *Women's Studies International Forum* (2017), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.05.005

ARTICLE IN PRESS

attention to the contradictions and difficulties that continue to plague the political credentials of cosmopolitanism.

In bringing gender and feminism to contemporary cosmopolitan scholarship it is not my aim to review the rich and prolific literature on new, critical and plural cosmopolitanisms, nor to make an argument about how and where gender and feminist theory might extend its intellectual or political credentials. My contribution is more modest. I seek to show how a global feminist politics materialises as an exemplar of "actually existing cosmopolitanism." Its complexities, as presented here, might in turn ground or temper some of the loftier investments in the emancipatory promise of cosmopolitism. That is to say that such political projects are messy and difficult and continually challenge the potential of a cosmopolitan "ethical horizon" (Werbner, 2008: 2) to undo or reconfigure the historically exclusionary relations between selves and others. This is not an argument against a cosmopolitan imaginary, but a testimony of how it continues to fail, though not entirely. I will attempt here to demonstrate the successes, failures and remediated attempts at a non-imperialist feminist, cosmopolitics by charting the transnational feminist campaign—"women's rights as human rights"—that took off in the 1980s. I focus especially on the campaign's work around the issue of violence against women. It is no irony that this cosmopolitical project was anchored in human rights claims, which are also beset with the same contradictions and criticisms that attach to cosmopolitanism – based in western liberal notions of the individual and an imposed universalism, and sometimes imperial in character. It is remarkable that this dynamic, troubled, yet rich form of actually existing cosmopolitanism has had so little impact on the cosmopolitan literature, even those that now argue for the study of cosmopolitan to be more grounded, engaged and focussed on experience and practice (see Fine, 2003; Schiller & Irving, 2014; Werbner, 2008). I also trace how this engaged feminist politics is located in a complex field of emotion, something that is also a notable omission from most cosmopolitan scholarship. The significance here is that emotions serve to illustrate the kinds of power relations and political aspirations that inflect the campaigns and acutely expose the impediments to a non-imperial cosmopolitanism. This paper is, for the most part, conceptual though I situate some of my broader theoretical considerations in an account of feminist approaches to violence against women in Australia. In this section of the paper I seek demonstrate two apparently contradictory effects of this global feminism—racist exclusion alongside cosmopolitan hospitality. I explore the racial exclusions that inhere in feminist inspired programs like women's refuges, and I report on my own long- term research with women of Vietnamese origin in Australia who experience as hospitable, the ambience that emerges from the institutionalisation of feminist politics. In the final section I return to emotion and feminist solidarity, suggesting them as both promising and necessary additions to cosmopolitan considerations.

From global sisterhood to transnational feminism - human rights, women's rights and violence against women

"Global sisterhood" (Morgan, 1984; Steinem, 1984) captured the sensibility of the 1960s women's movements that emerged in parts of the western world. These movements promoted international solidarity and global resistance against the equally international and global phenomena of gender oppression and inequality. The global sisterhood slogan of so-called second wave feminism faced immediate and sustained criticism for its assumptions and their consequences. Black feminists and postcolonial critics argued that feminist cooperation should be more genuinely attuned to global relations of power. The political subject of feminism – presumed to be first world, white, middle class and heterosexual "woman" – failed to resonate with the aspirations of working class indigenous, third world and lesbian women, and intensified their marginality. Suitable descriptive terms for feminist politics across national borders could not readily be found, but global sisterhood was deemed too thin a concept and practice to accommodate differences of race, class, culture and colonial and imperial history. Indeed it was thick with its own imperial tendencies.

Global sisterhood has thus been widely abandoned by feminist movements. Yet the dialogues surrounding UN International Decade for women 1976–1985 and the many UN conferences on gender between 1975 and 1995 accelerated painful, agonistic exchanges within transnational feminist networks ever-hopeful about feminist solidarity beyond the borders of the nation-state. The claim that western feminism continued to fail to appreciate and account for non-western women was captured most sharply in Mohanty's (1986, 2003: 22) notion of the "average Third World woman.

Western feminists were continually challenged to address their failures and to strive to understand their complicity in systems of global injustice. Sisterhood thus gave way to "transnational feminism" (Mendoza, 2002) or, as Grewal and Kaplan (1994) prefer, "feminist transnational practices:" this saw feminist solidarity as grounded in the political conditions and commitments of women from their own contexts of injustice or oppression. Shared political aspirations for a world of justice and gender freedom, instead of shared identity, was posited as a more suitable basis for cross border feminist solidarity.

The activism that energized feminists and enabled cross-border connections and collaboration transpired paradoxically through structures at odds with both gender freedoms and the newly realized necessity for dealing with difference in struggles for global justice. It was a global institution, the UN, and a universal discourse of Human Rights that instated such transnationalism. During the 1980s, prior to the 1993 Vienna UN world conference on human rights, feminists across the globe took up the failure of international human rights regimes to address women's experiences. In 1995, 189 countries adopted the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), which is still considered by many to be a comprehensive "blueprint" for women's human rights, and the slogan "women's rights as human rights" became a central claim. It was, however, both a unifying platform and a troubling focus for women activists seeking a transnational unity across national and cultural boundaries. Stivens (2001) notes that women's concerns recast as an apparently universalizing discourse of human rights was a difficult move, collapsing feminisms into a renovated formulation of human rights. Many claimed this as the dilution of feminism from a universal to a culturally relativist project, while others perceived this as a strengthening of imperialist feminisms. These tensions deeply polarized feminist transnationalism, generating both hostility and creative attempts to overcome the complexities of difference. Stivens (2001: 3), Cornwall and Molyneux (2006) and Levitt and Merry (2009, 2011) all proposed "contextualization" rather than universal abstraction as the key to avoiding these polarities: rights claims are embedded (Stivens, 2001) and vernacularized (Levitt & Merry, 2011; Merry, 2006) in local contexts and specific movements, and cannot be simply understood or dismissed as "imports" from the West (Stivens, 2001), as they are *framed and claimed* according to differing notions of womanhood (Cornwall & Molyneux, 2006: 1187).

"Women's rights as human rights" implicates feminism in a perpetual engagement with the tensions between imperialism and solidarity. These tensions might be regarded a major obstacle to a cosmopolitan feminism or as demanding an ongoing necessity to engage and transform praxis and politics. Indeed Niamh Reilly (2007) suggests that the accomplishments of transnational rights feminism from 1975 to 1995 were a model of such cosmopolitan feminism. Grewal and Kaplan argue however that "transnational", 'has become so ubiquitous…a descriptive modifier to so many phenomena…that its political valence seems to have been evacuated' (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001: 664).[2]

Controversy continued to attach to the movements' relations to race, culture, diversity and difference, exciting and undermining the elusive feminist unity sought. By the late 1980s the growing recognition within

[2] See Nagar and Swarr (2012), Combahee River Collective (1982), Mohanty (2003), Shohat (2001), Enloe (1990) Morgan (1984) and Bunch (1987).

Please cite this article as: Pardy, M., Transnational feminisms and cosmopolitan feelings, *Women's Studies International Forum* (2017), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.05.005

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6852549

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/6852549

Daneshyari.com