



**Colonialism and its Contemporaries: Feminist Reflections  
on the State of War and the Meaning of Solidarity**  
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Act 2: Greenland, April 21 – May 14, 2006

I am grateful to be here as this is my first trip to Greenland; I am reminded that conversations similar to these, about the meaning of self-determination, the very terms and contours of de-colonization, have occurred all over the world, perhaps not in the same form, but certainly in content. I want first to comment on a few points that were raised in our earlier discussion before moving to my prepared remarks.

Paul Gilroy spoke this morning about the kind of amnesia that has accompanied the European construction of otherness. And I want to say that that amnesia has profound political and psychic consequences for how we live the historical present, for how we imagine and structure the modes of “conviviality” that are crucial in any struggle for de-colonization. How do we move from amnesia to rememory, from consigning “others” to a mythic past to forming structures of engagement as embodied citizens in the present? What are the most fruitful models to get us there?

Second. The organization of this meeting is anchored in the relationship between art and politics, suggesting that art is not an individuated activity, the purview of the sole artist, but very much tied, in this instance, to liberatory and emancipatory projects for de-colonization so that the work of the artist is political and the work of politics creates an aesthetic meeting ground, so to speak. It is in this sense, I believe, we can speak about an “aesthetic of political struggle.” And what Gilroy would want us to reflect upon is the importance of straddling, or crossing inherited boundaries between forms and structures, which in the dominant knowledge/political paradigms are positioned as antagonistic. A politics of “conviviality” would of necessity have to straddle, indeed cross boundaries of race, class, sexuality, in order that we might live differently. Those spontaneous moments or situations that he described in London, where people cross those boundaries and behave differently toward one another, are the very moments

that carry with them the potential for other kinds of political agency; those moments carry the vision of a future lived in the present. The seeds of the future are contained in the present, as is the past. We do not get to a future via an escape from the present or of the past.

I am coming from Canada, after a long sojourn in the United States of North America, where the question of white settler colonization in relation to Aboriginal peoples poses a challenge to the Canadian state's discourse of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is an uneasy fit with the violence of settler colonization, especially when militarization abroad is undertaken and relies upon militarization of daily life at home. Aboriginal peoples are the most militarized and criminalized in the Canadian population. They are the most legislated against, that is, brought within the ambit of law, while not being legitimized.

This is the process on which I want to focus this morning, this process of militarization, war and empire building that one could say might frustrate the conditions for conviviality since they depend upon "othering" and the production of enemies as ideological fuel, fodder even. And I would like for us to think militarization in the context of globalization; both are deeply gendered and racialized; in fact they are constituted through gendered, sexualized, national and class hierarchies, which is to say that they are absolutely necessary to how these processes function. Gender, sexuality, etc. are not simply added on to how militarization and globalization function after the fact. Indeed, if sex, gender and race were not fundamentally important to these structures, in these relations, they could not be so readily mobilized in times of crisis such as these.

When we look at the US and examine the ideological symbols that the state and state friendly institutions (including the media) have mobilized to generate support for the war, we see that they are presumed through these very categories that are interrelated: de-masculinizing the "dark" foreign enemy in the form of an Orientalist effeminacy and perversity; criminalizing communities of colour, particularly impoverished black women and women of colour whose rates of incarceration outstrip those of white women, and of course white men. These groups are all made to occupy outsider status as a way to anchor the loyal white heterosexual citizen patriot within the ideological economy of wartime, to provide a rationale for the state to secure a homeland against both outsiders and certain insiders. This is how the war abroad is connected to the war at home; the symbols are created in a way to ensure their own tautology.

I said earlier that I would like for us to examine these twin processes of globalization and militarization and how they circulate. One of the major characteristics that distinguish this moment of globalization from old style colonization, say, is the globalization of production. Now we can understand this globalization of production in some very pragmatic ways by asking the question, for instance: do we know who produces our clothing? Have we read the tags on our clothing, the clothes we wear, these headphones we are using that announce that they were made in Germany; the cameras; who packaged the coffee we drank to wake up this morning? All those things we rely upon, that we believe makes us “civilized” that presumably distinguishes “us” from “them,” do we know who made them? Well, women and primarily women in the “Third World” make them. By women in countries in the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Pacific and by immigrant women in the “First World,” who are being drawn into export processing zones and sweatshops in ever increasing numbers to service global needs designed by multinational capital. In addition to production and manufacture, migrant agricultural work is globalized and so is domestic labour and sex work which actually follows the earlier colonial cartography, where Surinamese sex workers, for example, travel to find work in the Netherlands. One of the results of these processes – what we can call the pernicious underside of globalization – is the creation of a massive divide, not only between North and South and “First World” and “Third World” but also within countries; a class, gendered and racial polarization that creates larger and larger pockets of poverty and smaller pockets of wealth. While most people in the world have been drawn into globalization, not everyone experiences it in the same way. And we continue to be the beneficiaries of this system of exploitation even as different ones of us in this room are drawn into it in different ways.

Now, one of the ways in which we can understand the creation of poverty in relationship to globalization is in the meteoric rise in the criminalization and incarceration of impoverished women. Prisons is one of those institutions that has also been globalized, and women who have survived these forms of violence together with transnational feminist movements for prison abolition have taught us a great deal about these links as a way of understanding militarization itself. Women who have been made poor stand in a very important relationship to globalization, militarization and the rise and spread of the punishment industry.

Now, before I address the specific links, let me make two points. First, making these linkages is extremely important for radical movements for self-determination

because the state and other dominant institutions would have us believe that these processes have no relationship one to the other. But we need to bring them together because part of how the state operates is through division, segregation, so unless our analyses are adept enough and agile enough to link those divisions we would have bought into the same divisions that the state creates in order to produce and maintain separation. And if we buy into the same old scripts, we would greatly impede our capacity to move into those conditions of conviviality, or what I call the “conditions for solidarity.”

Second, militarization is more than the business of going to war. While central, we must also examine the processes that militarize daily life and our own participation in militarization. When we believe that war and intervention are the most pressing problem affecting the nation, we are buying into the official script of a national security state. When we believe, for instance, as the US state managers say, that the (heterosexual) nation should support the troops, which is actually assigning to the nation the feminine role after the manly job of decision-making has already happened, we are in full support of militarization. When we believe that the ultimate example of sacrifice is a form of patriotism in which one has to die for one’s country in the “enemy” battlefield, we are also buying into that official script. When we believe that the state has to intervene to protect women and children elsewhere – the enemy in the war zone – we are buying into the ideology of a patriarchal protective state by not examining the ways in which that same state undermines the very conditions in which women and children live within its own geographic borders.

All of these state ideologies about militarization are fundamentally gendered. Cynthia Enloe’s work<sup>1</sup> has shown that the state is dependent on women and on particular ideas of femininity and masculinity: the dutiful wife, the patriotic mother, women needing protection/rescue by the interventionist state, (white man save brown women from brown men); on military wives and sex workers to provide a range of material, ideological, political, erotic and eroticized services as part of its militarization work. Their importance is illuminated in the amount of resources that states devote to these practices, but also to the state’s attempts to have the military serve as the point of socialization for impoverished women and women on welfare in a context in which women’s failure to have husbands, failed heterosexuality, is made responsible for women’s poverty. Impoverished women and women on welfare are now being shuttled into marriage promotion programs and into the military, to become wives and proper citizen consumers, or to become soldiers and proper citizens committed to sacrifice for the nation,

now understood as the “homeland.” Women’s labour, then, underwrites these projects; women’s bodies are indispensable to these projects in the same way that women’s bodies are indispensable to the production work in export processing zones.

Now, from the way in which the state ideologies are generated, one would not think that all of these processes are indeed linked. In the case of the US, Canada, Europe and other postcolonial and neo-colonial states, welfare and the provision of the social wage became the site of grand contestation. This was the 1970s and 80s in which we saw major retrenchment of social services and the installation of structural adjustment as one arm of neo-liberal privatization, which is itself a global phenomenon. Within the US and Canada, those women who have been made the most vulnerable by the removal of the social safety net and the ordinary crises in capitalism – primarily Aboriginal, women of colour, immigrant and white working class women – live in communities that are the most highly policed and the most criminalized. These conditions are also linked to the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples, who are consistently convicted for “crimes” of hunting and fishing. And these conditions, the global explosion in women’s imprisonment, which have been given the name *Global Lockdown* by Julia Sudbury, are affecting women from “Lagos to Los Angeles.” According to Sudbury, “... in Britain, in the decade to 2002, the annual number of women in prison increased by 173 percent; whereas in 1970 ... in the United States ... there were 5,600 incarcerated women, by June 2001, 161,200 women were held in US prisons and jails, representing a staggering 2,800 percent increase.” In 1999, the Nigerian federal government released almost one fifth of the prison population, including hundreds of women, as an emergency measure to tackle the problem of rampant overcrowding.”<sup>2</sup>

Sudbury shows how “women’s testimonies of survival under neoliberal cutbacks, like SAP, border crossings, exploitation in the sex and drug industries, and life under military occupation and colonial regimes provide a map of the local and global factors that generate prison as a solution to the conflicts and social problems generated by the new world order.”<sup>3</sup>

This map also helps to explain why anti-globalization activists form networks with anti-prison and anti-militarization activists and why this work is necessarily transnational in scope.

Now, one of the questions we've got to ask ourselves is, are these processes invisible to us? Is what I am saying new? Or have we heard them before? Have you seen them? If you haven't seen them, that is as important as if you have seen them, because if you haven't seen them, what it means is that some of the ways in which power is being exercised is being made invisible to you, which means that part of the political work we've got to do is to make power visible, to uncover it. But it needs uncovering in those places, where it is made the most invisible. Do we know for instance that during the 1991 Gulf War, 62% of the women who were soldiers reported being sexually harassed? Not by the enemy but by the US troops! Do we know that on military bases the percentage of domestic violence has escalated markedly, and has escalated dramatically during the wartime? So it's important when we talk about these large processes of war and militarization, globalization and imprisonment, that we understand very specifically who is being affected and on what terms. It is this work that will assist us in doing the necessary solidarity work, the work of bringing together groups and constituencies, who may be positioned as enemies.

Let me, then, end by making just a few points. Part of our job, I believe, in being involved in a radical project – to engage de-colonization is a radical project – is our ability to move across the boundaries. Those might be boundaries of nation state, of class, they might be boundaries of race, they might be boundaries of gender, they might be boundaries of sexuality, and they might be boundaries of nationality. They might also be boundaries of fear and silence. Whichever boundaries we have inherited, our work has to be to cross them so that we can begin to see the relationship amongst things, not in order to see that they are all equal because there is inequality, but at least to see that there is relationship between and amongst them. That is one of our tasks.

The second is that de-colonization is a project for everyone. Everyone, even those who consider themselves superior. De-colonization is a project for everyone since everyone has been colonized in some way, though differently.

And the third point is that to move from colonization into solidarity requires desire, hard work and it also requires practice. If we imagine or we have a vision for a different kind of life we want to live, we have to begin practicing it. It doesn't simply come as if it was given to us on a platter. We know this. We have to begin that hard work of practicing it. Thank you.

## Notes

1. Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire*, Berkely & London: University of California Press, 2004.
2. Julia Sudbury (ed.), *Global Lockdown: Race, gender, and the prison-industrial complex*, New York: Routledge, 2005.
3. Julie Sudbury, "Introduction", in Sudbury, *op. cit.*, pp. xi-xiii.