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Introduction: Transnational Feminisms

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Over the past decade, transnationalism as a concept has revolutionized numerous fields within the social sciences and humanities, including American Studies and Women's Studies. As Bahar Gürsel and I outline in the introduction to *The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Turkey and the United States,* the inclusion of transnational perspectives in American Studies acquired increased academic attention after Shelley Fisher Fishkin's 2004 Presidential Address to the American Studies Association in which she "called on scholars to move away from a nationalist and/or nation-centered model of reading, teaching and researching the United States that prioritized the agendas of Americanists working in the United States" (Tunç and Gürsel 11). Her call to arms involved repositioning American Studies as a discipline that takes the transnational, rather than the national, as its point of departure. Such an approach, Fishkin posited, would not only ensure the "multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and goods," but would also, in the process, generate "social, political, linguistic, cultural, and economic crossroads" that would enrich our understanding of America and its global impact (Fishkin 21–22).

Expanding on Fishkin's initial project, Winfried Fluck added a new dimension to transnational American Studies by connecting it to a three-prong approach: one that escaped the legacy of American exceptionalism by examining the impact of the United States on other nations through increased international dialogue and collaboration; one that redefined American Studies as "transatlantic, transpacific, hemispheric [and] even global" (23); and one that reformulated American Studies as a field in constant flux. In other words, transnational American Studies, as these scholars envision it, is a field that transcends borders and mere comparative approaches by recognizing bias (especially of US-based Americanists) as well as the work conducted by Americanists beyond the borders of the United States. Above all, this approach involves "the recognition that non-

American scholars, working outside the geographical boundaries of the US, have just as much to contribute to American Studies as those within its borders" (Tunç and Gürsel 13), and the notion that some of the richest areas of research within the discipline are located beyond the physical United States, in the interstitial worlds created by American expatriates, for example. More importantly, however, this approach simultaneously stresses that transdisciplinarity and transnationalism are, by necessity, mutually inclusive. It asserts the fundamental idea that in order to understand the ways in which the United States functions globally, one must comprehend its international social, cultural, economic and historic expressions and formulations. As such, transnational American Studies embraces a wide array of epistemologies, ranging from film studies, to literary criticism, to material culture, to ethnic, racial and Women's Studies, all of which are explored, within the Turkish American context, in *The Transnational Turn in American Studies*, and within the Asian American context in "Redefining the American in Asian American Studies: Transnationalism, Diaspora and Representation," a special forum I co-edited with Elisabetta Marino and Daniel Y. Kim for the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*.

The "transnational turn" in Women's Studies actually predates the "transnational turn" in American Studies by almost two decades. Transnational Feminism traces its roots to what, in the 1980s, was called "Third World" feminism. Led by Chicana lesbian-feminists Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga in the US as an alternative to the white, middle class, western-oriented, America-centric women's activism of the 1960s and 70s, Third World feminism drew on the writing of postcolonial and subaltern theorists in order to establish a new framework for those who remained unrepresented in mainstream American feminism — namely, working class women, immigrant women, women of color, lesbian/bisexual/transgendered women, and women hailing from the Third World (or what is today called the "developing world") (Rosen 289–290). The agenda of Third World feminists focused on issues of race and ethnicity, and, in particular, sexual, economic, and cultural exploitation. Third World feminism exposed the elision/misrepresentation of women living beyond the borders of the "First World" and prioritized the issues affecting the lives of such unrepresented women. Moreover, Third World feminism sought to deconstruct umbrella terms such as "woman" and "feminism" into a spectrum of women, each with a multiple consciousness, who could

embrace an infinitesimal number of feminism***s*** (Anzaldua and Moraga). Furthermore, it rejected the conflation of "Third World" women into one indiscernible (poor/marginalized) group, stressed that feminism is an individual, lived experience, and acknowledged the factors that unite, and divide, women (Mohanty).

Third World feminism's transition into what in the 1990s came to be known as Global Feminism was catalyzed by its adoption by American "Third Wave" feminists who were particularly critical of the lack of diversity of preceding women's movements. Like Third World feminists, they openly acknowledged that women hail from a variety of backgrounds, that the cookie-cutter (and often heterosexist) activism of previous generations could not possibly begin to address concerns such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, reproductive freedom, economic equity, and educational and employment rights, which impacted women from different backgrounds differentially (Rosen 276–277). Like Third World feminists, Third Wave feminists, such as Jennifer Baumgardner, Amy Richards, and Rebecca Walker (daughter of novelist Alice Walker and goddaughter of Gloria Steinem) rejected essentialist notions that collapsed women into universal categories and binaries (Baumgardner and Richards; Walker). This idea, for many American feminists, served as the theoretical bridge between Third World feminism and Global (also known as world or international) Feminism, which rose to prominence during the 1990s through notable women's conferences and events including Lilith Fair and the United Nations' *Fourth World Conference on Women* (Beijing, 1995), which included a notable speech on the international status of women by Hillary Rodham Clinton, who was the American First Lady at the time (Rosen 340–344). However, Global Feminism soon fell out of favor because many feminists were troubled by certain strands of the movement which espoused a "world-wide alliance of women." This idealized and rather utopic notion of sisterhood, they believed, invariably lapsed into the same tropes of western condescension, paternalism, and cultural imperialism found in preceding feminist movements. A new model was needed, and thus Transnational Feminism was born.

Transnational Feminism, unlike previous feminist movements, emphasizes transnationality; specifically, the interstices, overlaps, and junctures that impact women's lives both within their own nations and across national borders. Moreover, it stresses concepts such as race,

ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, citizenship, immigration, mobility, globalization, hybridity, hyphenatedness, and diasporic identity while critiquing the impact that capitalism has had on these formations and on the political, social and economic conditions of women's lives. Like Third World feminism, it draws heavily on postcolonial, subaltern, and more recent feminist theory (especially texts by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, Lisa Lowe, Ella Shohat, Gayatri Spivak, Leila J. Rupp, Reina Lewis and Cynthia Enloe) and targets oppressive, hegemonic institutions, especially those which stem from the legacies of imperialism and colonialism. Moreover, while it encourages collaboration by women across borders, it simultaneously acknowledges, and exposes, the inherent inequalities and power struggles that can emerge from such relationships.

Transnational Feminism though an American Studies lens seeks to assess the impact of American feminisms abroad and the ways in which non-American feminisms have played out in the United States. Like transnational American Studies, it prioritizes the scholarship of individuals working beyond the geographical boundaries of the United States, and examines the ways in which American feminisms have been adopted and adapted by women in other nations to suit their local contexts. While it certainly espouses feminist collaboration across borders, it intentionally avoids declarations of a "worldwide sisterhood," since most self-indentified transnational feminists do not believe that such an alliance is possible (due to the differences among women) or even desirable. Moreover, much like scholars working in transnational American Studies, those working in Transnational Feminism also seek to deconstruct tropes such as American exceptionalism, western condescension, paternalism, cultural imperialism, and the "white woman's burden" that accompanied previous global feminist movements. Transnational Feminism represents a fundamental break with the past because it is essentially a paradigm shift *away from* orientalist and colonial discourses that prioritize "the West" and that marginalize the social, cultural, and historical contexts with which women struggle elsewhere in the world. In other words, Transnational Feminism signals a movement *towards* examining how "western" countries, such as the United States, are, for better or worse, implicated in global issues that impact women's lives and how these issues can be broached.

Over the past decade, Transnational Feminism has established itself as a significant discipline within Women's Studies and has thus become an

integral part of academic scholarship and college-level courses. However, according to Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, authors of one of the earliest, and arguably most influential, Transnational Feminist textbooks, *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World* (2001), "transnational feminist studies is not a luxury that is added to the end of a syllabus or that can be relegated to one week out of the semester or quarter" (xvii). Transnationalism, they argue, should be integrated into all contemporary feminist discourse — whether through academic writing, in the classroom setting, or within the realm of activism — so that important questions are asked, and answered, about "ethnocentrism, racism, and nationalist viewpoints as foundation[s] to gender identity and issues of sexuality" (xvii).

Numerous scholars have heeded their call, and the call of others working in the fields of Transnational Feminism and transnational American Studies, as evidenced by the explosion of academic scholarship in these fields and their overlapping subsets. Some recent notable texts include Catherine M. Orr, Ann Braithwaite, and Diane Lichtenstein's *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies* (2011); Nadine Naber's *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* (2012); Kimberly A. Williams's *Imagining Russia: Making Feminist Sense of American Nationalism in US–Russian Relations* (2012); Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner's *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time* (2012) (reviewed in this issue); and Leela Fernandes's *Transnational Feminism in the United States: Knowledge, Ethics, and Power* (2013).

One text that distinguishes itself for incorporating transatlantic and hemispheric American Studies alongside Transnational Feminism is Lisa L. Moore, Joanna Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton's *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions* (2012). A collection of primary sources from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this volume includes documents written by men and women, slave and free, which argue not only for women's liberation but also human liberation. Including poets such as Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley, revolutionaries such as Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, early women's rights activists such as Judith Sargent Murray, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Olympe de Gouges, and women whose feminist sensitivities were usurped by more urgent political, religious, or racial concerns (e.g., Abigail Adams, Anne Hutchinson, and Native American women such as Katherine Garret, Molly Brant, and Nancy

Ward), this collection not only transcends nation, forging an important lineage for contemporary transnational feminist texts, but, in the process, also compels readers to rethink the definition of Transnational Feminism. Focusing on women's experiences in the age of numerous revolutions (American, French, Haitian and others), this collection recuperates many of the lost voices of Transnational Feminism through the lens of nation-building and war. As the editors contend, these voices circulated freely in the Atlantic region and its surrounding areas (e.g., Europe, Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean), representing a transnational feminist intellectual network, or Age of Enlightenment, that intertwined with the male-dominated Age of Reason in Europe and the United States, and predated the contemporary transnational feminist movement by centuries.

This special issue of the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* thus represents an important intervention in Transnational Feminist studies — one that not only presents an overview and assessment of the field (past, present and future) by key scholars and activists, but also offers a glimpse into some of the innovative work that is currently being conducted in the field both within, and beyond, the physical geography of the United States. This issue also provides insight into the impact that American feminisms have had globally, how they can be reconfigured in other settings, and how non-American feminisms have shaped women in the United States. Furthermore, this issue opens up space for new dialogue, particularly about diaspora and (de)nationalization, the intersections between the different strands of Transnational Feminism, and the sort of feminist work that still needs to be done in Turkey and other countries in the region. It is divided into four sections, beginning with an interview with two pioneers in the field of Transnational Feminism, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, who discuss the reception of their groundbreaking textbook as well as their pedagogic experiences with Transnational Feminism. The second section of this issue includes two essays. The first, by Leila J. Rupp, is an assessment of the lessons that the history of the transnational women's movement can offer to contemporary Transnational Feminism. The second essay, by journalist Nicole Pope, examines women's status in Turkey and summarizes the gains that women need to make in order to broach equality in Turkish society.

Part three of this issue includes three articles, or examples, of the sort of innovative academic research that is occurring in the field. While

Dominique Cadinot's article analyzes the interaction between Arab (specifically Syrian) and American feminists during the early twentieth century from an historic perspective, Katherine Lashley and Julia Sattler examine Transnational Feminism through a literary lens. Specifically, Lashley focuses on the tensions between religious identity, national identity, and feminism, as well as the body politics of the Muslim world in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. Sattler investigates the transnational feminist poetics of African American author June Jordan and the ways in which she used her works to expose the oppression of global "Others." The final section of book reviews includes evaluations of some key texts in the field, rounding out what is positioned to be a memorable issue of the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*.

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