I begin by questioning what it means to live in a country that is at war, a country whose president, in announcing a global war on terror, has, in effect, declared war on the rest of the world. This question requires us to consider the unrepresentability of war in the United States, a country that has not experienced war within its own borders since the mid-nineteenth century. Yet we have experienced a comprehensive militarization of this society, and multiple wars are still being waged on many of our communities. Moreover, the war on terror that is unfolding both within and outside US borders has produced a moral panic that urges us to feel and act as if we were living under a state of siege.

Many years ago, when I first traveled to Europe, I was struck by a prevailing popular consciousness of war. It was almost two decades after the conclusion of World War II, although there was still material evidence of the assault of fascism. I was struck by the extent to which war was still palpable, by the contemporaneity of historical memories of war. And I compared these historical memories to what I considered to be an inability of people in the United States to cross the temporal divide that placed war in an inaccessible past.

Later, in 1973, I had the opportunity to meet a young girl who survived the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, and at that moment experienced a disjunction between the ways our movement against the war in Vietnam tended to represent war and the unimaginable suffering the US military was causing the people of Vietnam. Today people refer to the Haditha massacre that took place in November 2005, when US Marines killed fifteen Iraqi civilians in their homes, as the contemporary counterpart to My Lai.

But, despite our flaws in that era, we did respond, we did rise up in massive numbers, and we did take to the streets. As in previous historical periods, women were the key organizers of the anti-war movement, though they were not necessarily the most visible spokespersons and frequently were unable to move past the single-issue syndrome that focused only on 'ending the war.'

I am not saying that today we are afflicted with a collective apathy that
prevents us from achieving the heights of activism that were decisive in bringing the Vietnam War to an end. That is not my point. Indeed, it might be possible to argue that popular anti-war consciousness is far more widespread in the USA now in face of the war in Iraq than it was in relation to the war in Vietnam.

Yet I remain concerned about the failure to translate the vast anti-war sentiment within the country into a sustained movement that can effectively counter the imperial belligerence of the USA. If we are to reflect on ways feminism can aid us in contesting the culture of war, I want to pose the question of how feminist approaches can help us decipher the challenges we face today, which are, I believe, far more complicated than the challenges of the Vietnam War era. How can feminism help us to meet these contemporary challenges?

Before attempting to answer this question, I should say that the tradition of feminism with which I have always identified emphasizes not only strategies of criticism and strategies of transformation but also a sustained critique of the tools we use to stage criticism and to enact transformation. This tradition of feminism is linked to all the important social movements—against racism, against imperialism, for labor rights, and so forth. This tradition of feminism emphasizes certain habits of perception, certain habits of imagination. Just as it was once important to imagine a world without slavery, to imagine a world without segregation, to imagine a world in which women were not assumed to be inherently inferior to men, it is now important to imagine a world without xenophobia and the fenced borders designed to make us think of people in and from a southern region outside the USA as the enemy. It is now important to imagine a world in which binary conceptions of gender no longer govern modes of segregation and association, and one in which violence is eradicated from state practices as well as from our intimate lives—from heterosexual and same-sex relationships. And, as in the past, it is important to imagine a world without war. And, of course, this is just the beginning of the list.

But it is not enough simply to imagine a different future. We can walk around with ideal worlds in our heads while everything is crumbling around us. Feminist critical habits involve collective intervention as well. The feminist critical impulse, if we take it seriously, involves a dual commitment: a commitment to use knowledge in a transformative way, and to use knowledge to remake the world so that it is better for its inhabitants—not only for human beings, for all its living inhabitants. This commitment entails an obstinate refusal to attribute a permanency to that which exists in the present, simpy because it exists. This commitment simultaneously drives as to examine the conceptual and organizing tools we use, not to take them for granted.

This is the very core of feminism—at least the feminism with which I identify. Of course, there are many feminisms, including the George and Laura Bush version, which evokes the putative status of women under Islam as a rallying call for state terrorism. In this ‘feminism,’ Islam—within the Samuel Huntington ‘Clash of Civilizations’ framework—produces the terrorist enemy of democracy and the victimized woman who has to be saved by US democracy.

But a more thoughtful, a more radical, feminism exists, and with it, we can make gains in our efforts to end war, torture, and pervasive militarization. This more radical feminism is a feminism that does not capitulate to possessive individualism, a feminism that does not assume that democracy requires capitalisation, a feminism that is bold and willing to take risks, a feminism that fights for women’s rights while simultaneously recognizing the pitfalls of the formal ‘rights’ structure of capitalist democracy.

So, for example, this feminism does not say that we want to fight for the equal right of women to participate in the military, for the equal right of women to torture, or for the equal right to be killed in combat. This feminism rejects, as I have heard Zillah Eisenstein relate, the claims of a US military officer attending the graveside service of a female soldier killed in Iraq—a man who wept at what he spoke of as a palpable expression of women’s equality, the dead woman’s right to a military funeral.

But even as we are critical of an exclusive insistence on formal rights, we can consider other approaches to struggles for ‘equality.’ Instead of conceptualizing equality using a standard established by the dominance of men in the military, we can advocate for the equal right of women and men to refuse participation in the military. Moreover, we can extend our anti-military advocacy to include the dismantling of the military machine, even within a struggle for ‘equality.’

But the larger issue here is the relationship between individual and collective accomplishments. Victories achieved by individuals do not necessarily count as collective victories. For instance, women of color who manage to reach the highest level of government and who position themselves as architects and defenders of war do not advance the collective struggle of communities historically subjugated on the basis of race and gender. Rather their situation militates against gender and racial equality.

Feminism is concerned with women’s equality, it is concerned with gender equality, and it is also concerned with issues of sexuality and race.
But there may be something more important than the particular issues traditionally associated with feminism. It may be far more important to emphasize feminist methodologies than the abstractions that count as the objects of feminism. The importance of this approach is suggested by the history of feminisms in the twentieth century—a history that consisted largely of contestations over who gets to represent the abstraction ‘women’ and particularly the raced and classed character of those representations.

When I refer to feminist methodologies, I include both scholarship and organizing—in other words, methodologies for interdisciplinary analysis, and also methodologies for building movements. These feminist methodologies impel us to explore connections that are not always apparent. They enable us to inhabit contradictions and to discover what is productive about those contradictions. These are methods of thought and action that urge us to think things together that appear to be entirely separate and to disaggregate things that seem to naturally belong together.

Feminist scholar/activists present at the 2006 ‘Feminism and War’ conference—Zillah Eisenstein, Cynthia Enloe, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Jasbir Puar, for example—have given us conceptual tools that are applicable both to research and to organizing practices. There continues to be a need for the development that was so exciting at the conference—scholars talking to activists, scholar/activists talking to activist intellectuals about a whole host of questions raised by the current state of US wars.

Feminist scholars and feminist activists attempt to peer through the ideological veil. And feminists have always been in the forefront of the peace movement. But as we now know, it is not enough simply to call for peace. And peace cannot be envisioned as the simple cessation of war. Aristophanes’ play Lysistrata was not only about the women withholding sex from the male warriors in order to compel them to stop making war, it was also about restructing a gendered society.

Let me return to my earlier reflections on My Lai and Haditha as a way of engaging with the ways in which the circumstances of war are represented, and with the attempts to pierce the ideological veil thrown over it. It cannot be denied that the widespread circulation of photographs of the My Lai massacre, during the Vietnam War era, played a role in crystallizing opposition to the war. But it was certainly not the case that the photographs by themselves mobilized millions of people. The mistaken assumption that the mere existence of visual evidence of war atrocities elicited the anti-war sentiment that ended the Vietnam War leads people to ask today why a similar response was not generated by the images of the war in Iraq.

It is true that the embeddedness of war journalism has restricted what we see and hear about Iraq. Yet we have seen horrendous images of torture. There were the accidental images of torture in the Abu Ghraib prison that were never meant to be publicly released. If photographs by themselves were able to spur people to action, long ago we should have been in the street by the millions twenty-four hours a day. Even though we have not seen the worst images. Even though we have yet to see images of women who were detained and interrogated in Abu Ghraib. Even though we have not seen and have to imagine the conditions of prisoners who have been subject to extraordinary rendition. Even though we have not seen prison cells that are the size of a coffin—six by three in places like Syria, where people labeled by the US government as enemy combatants are being held. Even though we have not seen visual evidence of these atrocities, we have accessed this information in other ways. So we are aware, for instance, of the massacre at Haditha.

But let’s return to the question of the images we have actually seen. It seems that we think about them in eighteenth-century terms. We still believe in enlightenment. I am not suggesting that we shouldn’t be enlightened and that we shouldn’t enlighten others. The problem to which I am referring emanates from the assumption that rational communication and publicity are sufficient—as Immanuel Kant suggested.

We tend to relegate so much power to the image that we assume not only that the meaning of the image is self-evident but we also fetishize the image, thinking that it will spur us to action.

The images of My Lai and other instances of massive violence that did not distinguish between military personnel and civilians are not what organized the anti-war movement. The photographs did not organize the movement—it was organized by committed women and men who were enraged and engaged, not only at the point of mobilization, but in other areas of their lives as well. Their engagement created the context for the reception of those photographs. Their engagement produced the meaning that was attached to the photographs.

The images depicting torture at Abu Ghraib were released into an environment so charged with assumptions about the hegemony of US democracy that the images themselves were overdetermined by the need to explain them in relation to democracy. The concern with the need to rescue US democracy pushed the real meaning of torture, and especially the suffering of prisoners depicted, into the background. People voicing widespread expressions of shock and revulsion in relation to the
photographs asked, ‘How is this possible?’, ‘How can this happen?’, and asserted, ‘This is not supposed to happen’—all within certain assumptions about US democracy. There was disbelief and an impulse toward justification, rather than an engagement with the contemporary meaning of torture and violence seen in the images.

As feminists, we cannot relinquish our own agency to the image. We cannot even assume that the image has a self-evident relation to its object. We must consider the political economy that constitutes the environment within which images are created and consumed. Feminists adopt critical habits, including a critical stance toward the visual.

And we are also vigilant with respect to the vocabulary we use to conceptualize and implement strategies for change. As I indicated before, we should develop habits that compel us to engage in constant criticism of the things that we wish to change, as well as criticism of the tools that we use to conceptualize what we want to change.

In this context, I want to bring the term ‘diversity’ into my discussion. The danger of this term consists in the way its use has colonized histories of social justice, so that much of what we were once able to talk about with greater specificity is forced into hiding behind the concept of ‘diversity.’ The use of the term also promotes a hidden individualization of problems and solutions that ought to be collective. For instance, one hears about the ‘diversity’ of US military forces—with respect to people of color and increasingly with respect to women—as a model for racial and gender equality in other institutions. As a matter of fact, besides the military, another place you might go if you want to see diversity is in the US prisons.

And—what is immensely important—‘diversity’ is a concept that provincializes the relationship of people within the USA to the world. The concept emerges from US ideology that equates racial and gender justice with color blindness and gender blindness. But undocumented immigrants live outside the embrace of official diversity. With the retooling of a racism that equates the practice of Islam with terrorism, people of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent live outside the embrace of diversity.

And if we are feminists vigilant with respect to the vocabulary we use in thinking and implementing strategies for change, we must consider that ‘democracy’ is also a term that requires constant criticism, for wars are being conducted in its name, torture is justified in its name, and democracy has become a watchword for the most abominable violations of human rights. The official deployment of the term ‘democracy’ by the administration of US President George W. Bush has led to its equation with torture, terror, and a wholesale denial of individual and collective rights. The ideological strategies of the Bush administration involved the invocation of the struggle to preserve and expand democracy as a justification for the rapid erosion of democratic rights. Feminism is committed to a constant criticism of these ideological processes.

We now face a situation in the USA in which torture is not recognized as torture, secret prisons are not revealed, extraordinary rendition amounts to routine torture, and domestically there is fencing off of the Mexican border to prevent people whose lives have been destroyed by the impact of global capitalism from entering this country. And, of course, the number of people in US jails and prisons continues to rise—there are now 2.2 million people behind bars—which means that the United States incarcerates proportionally more people than any other country in the world. Feminist approaches insist on exploring the relationship between militarization and the prisonization of our local and global landscapes.

So when we say that we are dedicated to eliminating violence against women, we cannot stop with the project of addressing individual acts of violence committed either within intimate relationships or by individual strangers. Violence is not only individualized and domestic, and the perpetrators of violence are not only individual men. We therefore place state violence, war, prison violence, torture, capital punishment on a spectrum of violence. And while we cannot simultaneously eliminate the entire spectrum of violence, we can always insist on an awareness of these connections. In other words, feminism is not only about women, nor only about gender. It is a broader methodology that can enable us to better conceptualize and fight for progressive change.

Torture, for example, cannot be treated as an aberration, as a spectacular exception, but rather we try to understand its links to regimes and practices associated with the punishment of imprisonment within the domestic framework as well. Isn’t capital punishment a form of torture? What is the link between the torture at Abu Ghraib and the routine, unquestioned torture associated with imprisonment? Why are we so quick to speak out against these spectacular examples of torture—and indeed we should—while ignoring what happens to thousands and millions of domestic prisoners within the USA? Why do we cry out against secret prisons, when only a small fraction of the population has ever bothered to find out what happens behind the walls of US state and federal prisons—that is, if we have not been a prisoner or relative of a prisoner ourselves? Aren’t maximum-security prisons secret places? Aren’t women’s prisons, wherever they might be located, also secret places?
Resisting militarism for the globe

ZILLAH EISENSTEIN

Since September 11 2001, there has been a female face to the wars of terror, but the meaning of this is not self-evident. Females assist in the orchestration of the US wars of terror, and therefore women have more complicity in these wars. Yet there is nothing more undemocratic than war, so it is highly unlikely that women’s presence can mean anything good. No one’s rights – especially not women’s – can be met in war; or by waging war.

Females, although still a minority, are more present in militaries, as government officials as suicide bombers, as soldiers in Third World countries than in earlier times. There are more women being militarized for and against imperial power. Today there are more women at these sites of power, or what were sites of power, fighting on behalf of the powerful, and they are more visible. This visibility is unusual because females are more often than not out of view – made absent, silenced – rather than seen. So the fact that women appear more present needs attention.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wields power, but not as a woman – whatever this might really mean today – and not for women and their rights – but for an imperial democracy that destroys women’s equality and racial justice. Imperial democracy uses racial diversity and gender fluidity to disguise itself – and females and people of color become its decoys. Condi’s black skin and female body operate to cloud and obfuscate. Imperial democracy mainstreams women’s rights discourse into foreign policy and militarizes women for imperial goals. Imperial democracy creates women combatants both inside and outside the military, and First Lady Laura Bush authorizes this process as civilian-in-chief. My point is not that nothing has changed, or that these changes do not matter, but rather that these changes do not mean what they seem to mean.

War bespeaks exceptional circumstances and is also naturalized as part of the human condition: there will always be war(s). War is then awful and normal; universal and yet unique. Each war is both similar and different to a previous one; it is both changed and static. The Vietnam War is different than the Afghan and Iraq wars, and not. Each war is defined by and defines anew its racialized gender power relations.
Deconstructing the myth of liberation @ riverbendblog.com

NADINE SINNO

The rhetoric surrounding the US invasion and occupation of Iraq has often been articulated in the form of artificial dualisms, employed by a hegemonic American corporate media, which rarely counters the ‘official’ line of the administration: ‘good’ versus ‘evil’, ‘terrorists’ versus ‘victims’, ‘occupation’ versus ‘liberation’, and so on. In Language and Politics, Noam Chomsky mentions the media’s complicity in eliciting support for the war through their uncritical dissemination of the government’s war propaganda: ‘The media uncritically relayed government propaganda about the threat to US security posed by Iraq, its involvement in 9-11 and other terror, etc. Some amplified the message on their own. Others simply relayed it ... Once the war began, it became a shameful exercise of cheering for the home team, appalling much of the world’ (2004: 420).

The rather dismal situation of the mainstream media – in its distortion of facts, glorification of war, downplaying of atrocities, and support of military ‘achievements’ – is by no means new or surprising. The media have traditionally played the role of the sender, we (the audience) the receivers. ‘Media institutions depend on a silent division, reproduced across social space, between those who make stories and those who consume them’ (Coudry and Curran 2003: 42).

Today, however, the dominant, mainstream media are no longer the sole providers of news and information. This era of information technology explosion has witnessed the proliferation of ‘alternative producers’ of information – who are still located at the margins of the news network, but who are, nonetheless, posing challenges to the mainstream media; prime among them are bloggers who are typing their hearts and minds out on the Web for readers who choose to pursue alternative news outlets.

Riverbend, author of Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq, a book collection of one year’s blog entries, did just that. Frustrated with watching US-based television networks CNN and Fox broadcast inaccurate (or, at best, abridged) information about the war in Iraq, Riverbend, a young Iraqi female living in Baghdad, proclaimed her right to tell her side of the story about the war. This ‘Third World’ woman carved out a space, a territory, not usually accessible to most marginalized people of her
gender, age, or nationality. She appropriated technology, namely the Internet blog, to provide her alternative narrative of what is going on in her immediate environment. She also appropriated English, the language of the dominant discourse, thus making her views accessible to a wide audience of English speakers who otherwise might not have access to her blog. Riverbend's blogs challenge the master narrative fabricated and disseminated by US mainstream media through actively deconstructing the war rhetoric, using sarcasm as a means of ridiculing authority figures and the purported 'achievements' resulting from the regime change, recounting stories of the (otherwise) voiceless underdogs, exposing the underlying colonialist motives and repercussions of the invasion, and promoting global activism and transnational dialogue.

Riverbend's deconstruction of war rhetoric is manifested through her relentless challenging of the different binary oppositions often characteristic of war discourse, as articulated by US government officials and the mainstream media. Among the major concepts that she explores (and explodes) throughout her collection are the terms 'terrorism' and 'terrorist(s). In some of her posts, Riverbend quotes sections of US president George W. Bush's speeches (which are fraught with references to terrorism) and shows how, more often than not, the military 'raids' that are supposed to target terrorists end up killing innocent people instead. For instance, she posts Bush's following announcement: 'Since the end of major combat, we have conducted raids seizing many caches of enemy weapons and massive amounts of ammunition, and we have captured or killed hundreds of Saddam loyalists and terrorists' (2005: 58). In response to him, she writes:

Yes, we know all about 'raids'... The 'loyalists and terrorists' must include Mohammed Al-Kubeisie of Jihad Quarter in Baghdad who was 11. He went outside the second floor balcony of his house to see what the commotion was all about in their garden... Mohammed was shot on the spot. I remember another little terrorist who was killed four days ago in Baquba... This terrorist was 10... No one knows why or how he was shot by one of the troops while they were raiding his family's house. They found no weapons, they found no Ba'athists, they found no WMD. (Ibid.: 58)

In this example, Riverbend does not theorize about terrorism; rather, she simply relays to us actual incidents that have resulted from the same 'raids' that Bush presents as a means of combating 'terrorists.' Thus, 'terrorist' starts to signify and literally include 'innocent' or 'victim.' Riverbend's entries include a plethora of references to raids in which the army ended up killing civilians. If such incidents were covered regularly by the media, the term 'terrorism' would start automatically to sound dubious to the average American, not just the Riverbend reader, the cynical academic or the peace activist. Such dubiousness, however, would undermine the necessity of waging wars, because once a war is defined in vague, non-oppositional terms – once categories like 'good' and 'evil,' 'civilian' and 'military,' and even 'war' and 'peace' become blurred, apprehension about war becomes inevitable. As Miriam Cooke comments:

There are risks attendant on the dismantling of the War Story. Why go to war if victory and defeat are not clear-cut, mutually exclusive concepts? Low-intensity conflict may spill into a non-militarized zone, but people still need to believe in the separation of space into dangerous front – men's space – and danger-free home – women's space. And then who would venture into battle if there is doubt about the goodness and loyalty of troops and allies and the total evil of the enemy? (Cooke 1996: 7)

Not only does Riverbend speak of the ambiguity that characterizes the word 'terrorist,' she also describes the Iraqi domestic sphere's current transformation into a militarized zone such that a whole household of innocent men and women could be branded as 'terrorist' (or a terrorist cell) for merely owning more than the permitted 'single weapon' – at a time when neither the police nor the troops have the resources to ensure the safety of Iraqi civilians.

Every male in the house is usually armed and sometimes the women too. It's not because we love turning our homes into arsenals, but because the situation was so dangerous (and in some areas still is) that no one wants to take any risks. Imagine this scene: a blue mini-van pulls up... 10 dirty, long-haired men clamber out with Kalashnikovs, pistols, and grenades and demand all the gold and the kids (for ransom). Now imagine trying to face them all with a single weapon... (Riverbend 2005: 145)

Even more disturbing is Riverbend's assertion that children who witness the raids on their homes will probably grow up to become real terrorists, as a result of falling victims to the troops' occasional abuse of power. 'The troops were pushing women and children shivering with fear out the door in the middle of the night,' she writes. 'What do you think these children think to themselves? What do they think is creating the "terrorists?"' (Ibid.: 145). Riverbend complicates the term 'terrorist' and shows how the abuse of power will inevitably breed more terrorism, how the same forces of 'good' that are there to combat terrorism are planting the seeds of terrorism, as they 'terrorize' civilians. Undeniably,
Riverbend provides an insider's war narrative that opposes the myth of war in its clear-cut categories of 'public' and 'private' and which emphasizes everybody's involvement in the victimization, resistance, and survival process.

In addition to her contestation of the term 'terrorism' (and its derivatives), Riverbend also contests the term 'liberation.' For people who lost loved ones, property, and security, 'liberation' is by no means a signifier of 'freedom.' In her description of the early days of the 'war of liberation,' she writes: 'We've been liberated from our jobs, and our streets and the sanctity of our homes ... some of us have even been liberated from the members of our family and friends' (ibid.: 227). Riverbend's use of the word 'liberation' to mean 'freedom from all that constitutes a stable life' is ironic and poignant because it strips the word of all positive connotations; in doing so, she also invalidates the supposedly benevolent ends of war, as she highlights the destructive effects of that 'liberation.' Riverbend's story of liberation invalidates the master narrative on freeing Iraqis from dictatorship and oppression. 'Liberation,' Riverbend concludes, often suggests terrorism in disguise, rather than the opposite of 'terrorism.' In other words, 'liberation' and 'terrorism' are both 'in the eye of the beholder,' the domineering beholder, rather than fixed terms signifying opposite meanings. She writes, 'We've learned that terrorism ... isn't the act of killing innocent people and frightening others ... no, you see, that's called "liberation."' It doesn't matter what you burn or who you kill - if you wear khaki, ride a tank or Apache ... then you're not a terrorist - you're a liberator' (ibid.: 228).

Riverbend's use of the terms 'terrorism' and 'liberation' in a subversive manner (and almost always within quotation marks) reflects her ability to play with language and reveal how it has been manipulated by war advocates. In fact, her subversion of common terms and concepts, even her conscious rejection of terms such as 'liberation,' reflects her deep understanding of the power of language and the hybridity of writing as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin in The Dialogic Imagination:

> Every word used 'with conditions attached,' every word enclosed in intonational quotation marks, is likewise an intentional hybrid - if only because the speaker insulates himself from this word as if from another language, as if from a style, when it sounds to him (for example) too vulgar, or on the contrary too refined, or too pompous, or if it bespeaks a specific tendency, a specific linguistic manner and so forth. (Bakhtin 1981: 76)

In brief, words like 'raids,' 'terrorism,' and 'liberation' are a few examples that represent a myriad of war-rhetoric words that Riverbend deconstructs throughout her narrative. Other words that she ultimately complicates include 'insurgency,' 'resistance,' 'civilization,' and even 'Iraqi National Day' – as she infuses them with meanings and connotations normally associated with their antonyms.

In addition to complicating the terms employed by the pro-war rhetoric, Riverbend sprinkles her text with cut-throat humor that targets US and Iraqi officials, thus making them objects of ridicule and stripping them of their authority, if only temporarily - or symbolically. Among those official figures is Ahmad Al-Chalabi, an Iraqi expatriate convicted of embezzlement charges in Jordan, who was prominent in collaborating with the USA to overthrow Iraqi president Saddam Hussein through his position as a member of the executive council of the 'Iraqi National Congress,' a group created in 1992 to work with the USA. Riverbend's introduction of Al-Chalabi as one of the 'puppets' of the American government is tragic-comic: 'This guy is a real peach ... He was a banker who embezzled millions from the Petra Bank in Jordan. My favorite part of his life story is how he escaped from Jordan in the trunk of a car ... a la modern-day Cleopatra if you will ... He's actually America's gift to the Iraqi people - the crowning glory of the war, chaos and occupation: the looter of all looters' (ibid.: 26). Calling a member of the new government a 'peach' and a 'modern-day Cleopatra' (among other things) would inevitably influence her readers' perceptions whenever they see or hear Al-Chalabi speak in public; the reader simply cannot see him the same way, nor take him seriously. Implicating the Pentagon for sponsoring a suspicious, fraudulent, and 'clownish' man also sheds doubts on the motivations and credibility of US officials, making them, too, objects of ridicule. In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin discusses the power of laughter in debunking authority: 'Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it' (1981: 25).

In addition to poking fun at major Iraqi authority figures (Riverbend goes through the list of Iraqi Council members, calling each one 'flavor of the month'), she mocks US officials such as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and President George W. Bush, thus making them, too, objects of 'free investigation.' It is important to note here that Riverbend's humor is never out of context; rather she contextualizes her humorous responses wisely, often responding to an official's visit to Iraq or to an official's public speech or interview (a 'media moment'). For instance, after reading one of Bush's speeches (for lack of a better option, power
being out), regarding the situation in Iraq, Riverbend 'paraphrases' the speech according to her own understanding of Bush’s message. Her ‘abridged version’ of the speech reads:

Friends, Americans, Countrymen, lend me your ears ... lend me your sons and daughters, lend me your tax dollars ... so we can wage war in the name of American national security ... so I can cover my incompetence in failing to protect you ... so I can add to the Bush and Cheney family coffers at your expense and the expense of Iraqi people. I don’t know what I’m doing, but if you spend enough money, you’ll want to believe that I do. (Riverbend 2005: 59)

Riverbend’s parodic reconstruction of Bush’s speech is a counter-narrative to Bush’s master narrative. Her humor is both a defense (of the self from perpetual sadness) and an offense (against authority); it is in that sense that her blogging is both a private and public act. In addition to the therapeutic effects of laughter, the main purpose of Riverbend’s paraphrase remains urging the readers to be critical of the motivations and repercussions of this war. In other words, Riverbend’s parody reminds us that ‘[t]he causes of war must be explored’ and that ‘surely war is not inevitable; it is only made to seem that way’ (Cooke 1996: 13).

The humorous sections of Baghdad Burning do not allow us the luxury of overindulging in our ‘escape’ from the painful reality of war. Riverbend swings her narratives between hilarity and heartbreak, thus eliciting from us feelings and reactions as ‘ambivalent’ and ‘complicated’ as the occupation she describes. Among the painful narratives that Riverbend recounts in her blogs are those often downplayed (or untold) stories of helpless families, especially women, that have lost family members to smart bombs or those who have suffered abuse at the hands of the military. For instance, after describing the great moments of bonding that often occur in bomb shelters, Riverbend takes us aback with a horrifying story about a woman who left a bomb shelter momentarily (to get a supply of food and water), only to come back and find her eight children dead — after a smart bomb found its way into a basement containing over four hundred women and children:

The bodies were laid out one beside the other — all the same sizes shrunk with heat and charred beyond recognition. Some were in the fetal position, curled up, as if trying to escape within themselves. Others were stretched out and rigid, like the victims were trying to reach out a hand to save a loved one or reach for safety. Most remained unrecognizable to their families ... (Riverbend 2005: 209)

The mother of eight now permanently lives in the bomb shelter, which has become her home. The children of the neighborhood refer to the shelter as ‘maskoon,’ ‘haunted.’ In response to this posting, Riverbend received emails from readers arguing that the bomb shelter was a ‘legitimate target’ because American officials assumed it was being used for ‘military purposes.’ Such responses to the story of the bomb shelter are as revealing in themselves. After all, the rhetoric articulated by people justifying the targeting of a bomb shelter mirrors the mainstream discourse; it indicates that these readers have wholly accepted and internalized the legitimacy of the violence as propagated by authority figures. To use Cooke’s words, ‘When violence is thus deemed justified and its cause and proponents have become widely credible, the seeds of power have been sown’ (1996: 98).

In her reply to those who attempted to justify the attack on the bomb shelter, Riverbend merely calls for the military’s adherence to the Geneva Conventions, international law protecting prisoners of war from torture, which states: ‘In case of doubt whether an object which is normally dedicated to civilian purposes is being used to make an effective contribution to military action ... it shall be presumed not to be so used’ (Riverbend 2005: 213). Riverbend’s atypically restrained reaction seems to reflect her refusal to honor the comments justifying the rhetoric of violence or to engage in it any further.

Among the stories that Riverbend also posts on her blog is that of a young woman who was imprisoned with her mother and brothers in Abu Ghraib, the US prison in Baghdad, ‘home to thousands of criminals and innocents alike’ (ibid.: 234), for allegedly being part of some ‘resistance,’ even though there was no evidence to that effect, and even though it later became clear that the young woman’s neighbor had used his connections (with a translator in the army) to implicate the family owing to a fight he had with one of the brothers. The young woman speaks of being beaten in prison and of witnessing the rape of a male prisoner by one of the guards (ibid.: 234). As the young woman tells her story and that of other prisoners, we once again get the perspective of someone who was, literally, inside what later became the most scandalous prison associated with this war. It is later, upon seeing the pictures of torture from Abu Ghraib, that Riverbend understands what the young woman meant when she said, ‘I’m one of the lucky ones ... all they did was beat me’ (ibid.: 235). Riverbend’s conscious attempt at including stories within stories — told by the victims themselves — strikes one as a manifestation of Balibar’s ‘heteroglossia,’ as her narrative ‘permits a multiplicity of social voices’ (1981: 261).
In addition to describing the atrocities of war through recounting stories told by the victims themselves, Riverbend exposes and analyzes the neocolonialist and imperialist motivations that propelled the bombing of Iraq. For instance, on the day in 2003 that the UN headquarters in Baghdad was bombed, Riverbend's blog explained how this could never have happened to the Iraq Oil Ministry, which was being 'guarded 24/7 by [US] tanks and troops ... ever since the fall of Baghdad,' and which will 'continue [to be so] under [US Director of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance] Bremer's watchful eye until every drop of oil is gone' (Riverbend 2005: 9). Riverbend calls on the various invading states, as the 'occupying power,' to use some of their resources to ensure the safety of such humanitarian establishments and of Iraqi civilians who were becoming increasingly subject to random acts of violence.

Added to the human and material losses, she demonstrates, are the crumbling of the economy and the subsequent loss of jobs for the majority of Iraqis. In the face of such devastation, however, the USA continues to exhibit (from the viewpoint of many Iraqis, including Riverbend) its neocolonialist motivations. For instance, the rebuilding of Iraq was outsourced to non-Iraqi companies (such as Halliburton Energy Services, a US-based multinational corporation), thus putting Iraq under immense debt and depriving its people of the opportunity of making badly needed profit, let alone rebuilding their own country. Riverbend's blog thoroughly documents the costly rebuilding of Iraq through foreign companies as opposed to Iraqi nationals. Moreover, in addition to providing us with actual figures regarding the gaps in costs, she argues that there are numerous Iraqi experts who - as a result of the first Gulf War against Iraq by the USA - had gained solid experience in rebuilding their country's bridges and buildings for such 'times of danger,' which makes them more qualified than their Western counterparts, who know very little about the country. She writes:

A few already rich contractors are going to get richer, Iraqi workers are going to be given a pittance, and the unemployed Iraqi public can stand on the sidelines and look at the glamorous buildings being built by foreign companies ... I always say this war is about oil ... But it is about huge corporations that are going to make billions off of reconstructing what was damaged during this war. Can you say Halliburton? (Ibid.: 36–7)

Riverbend concludes that it is only natural for Iraqis to roll their eyes upon hearing the word 'reconstruction'; after all, this reconstruction is going to be costly and designed by the foreign powers. Understandably, many Iraqis, she explains, see the USA as a colonizing power whose primary goals are occupation and the abuse of resources rather than liberation. As the great anti-colonialist politician and poet Aimé Césaire put it, 'Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses' (1972: 21). Yet the official discourse, Riverbend explains, does not take into account the rhetoric of reconstruction, as if reconstruction is the USA's gift to the Iraqi people, and as if Iraq did not have a great infrastructure - a civilization really - before the invasion. Of the myth of the 'pre-invasion' Iraq, she writes: 'Myth: Iraqis, prior to the occupation, lived in little beige tents set up on the sides of little dirt roads all over Baghdad. The men and boys would ride to school on their camels, donkeys, and goats ... Girls and women sat at home, in black burkas, making bread and taking care of 10–12 children' (Riverbend 2005: 34).

Most importantly, Riverbend laments the post-invasion status of Iraqi women, who actually lost many of their rights as a result of the invasion and the ensuing spread of fundamentalism. She writes that, contrary to popular belief, before the US invasion, Iraqi women 'made up over 50% of the working force. They were doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, professors, deans, architects, programmers, and more. They came and went as [they] pleased. They wore what they wanted ...' (Ibid.: 22). Now, however, Riverbend, like many other women, is jobless; she also cannot go out 'in pants' and has to wear 'a long skirt and loose shirt,' because '[a] girl wearing jeans risks being attacked, abducted, or insulted by fundamentalists who have been ... liberated!' (Ibid.: 17). Worse still, women who try to become politically active or who simply try to hold on to their jobs risk their lives, as was the case for Henna Aziz, an electrical engineer, who was assassinated by a group of fundamentalists in the presence of her husband and children (Ibid.: 24) and Akila Al-Hashimi, the council member, who was ambushed and murdered by armed men on her way to work (Ibid.: 75).

Once again, Riverbend's account of the post-invasion situation of women challenges the dominant discourse's narrative on women's liberation, 'democracy,' and 'regime change,' which many officials had also been claiming as justifiable reasons for waging war. In many ways, Riverbend's account of her and other women's fate under occupation invalidates the liberation narrative normally associated with military presences. In fact, this pseudo-liberation narrative had been a prominent feature of the first Gulf War, whereby US officials politicized the women's liberation movement in the USA to gain support for intervening in the
Gulf. In her article ‘Military presences and absences,’ Therese Saliba explores the connection between military invasion and Arab women’s situation:

The marketing of the Gulf War to US audiences was consistent with popular culture’s marketing of the Arab world to the West through the circulation of stereotyped images of Arabs which alluded to the benevolence of the United States or Western influence in their lives. The specifically gendered representations of demonized Arab men and captive or absent Arab women fed a revival of colonialist attitudes, and heralded George Bush’s new world order to reassert US dominance in the Middle East. (Saliba 1994: 125)

Riverbend educates many readers who have emailed her questions about the hijab, explaining to them that the veil itself is not oppressive, but that imposing it is oppressive – something that was unheard of during Saddam’s secular regime, which kept the fundamentalism at bay. That said, Riverbend doesn’t glorify Saddam’s era; she simply highlights the fact that women had more rights under his regime and that the war advocates who promised to liberate Iraqi men and women from all forms of oppression did not have the Iraqis’ interests in mind. As Saliba writes, ‘war, while often justified in the rhetoric of liberation, is rarely intended to liberate anyone – least of all women’ (ibid.: 132).

Undeniably, Riverbend’s interactive blog serves a goal larger than the immediate broadcasting of stories and reflections from the war zone. While giving her readers access to such a perspective is certainly valuable, Riverbend also makes a conscious effort to promote global political activism. For instance, she posts information from transnational bloggers, professors, soldiers, and writers, and she refers her readers to articles, journals, or books that might be helpful in understanding current events. She also comments on other bloggers’ posts, thus allowing herself to become part of an online imagined community of thinkers and writers. Her active engagement with other bloggers proves her commitment to the promotion of dialogue. In her book Global Obscenities: Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Lure of Cyberfantasy, Zillah Eisenstein discusses the advantages of cyberdialogue, especially in its mobilization of anti-war activism. ‘Such communication allows for diasporic publics to connect with one another and initiates new alliances with people “outside” one’s immediate geographical region. These disparate and dispersed communications can be used to build structures for change and mobilize struggles for peace, equality, and a healthy environment’ (1998: 168).

It is important to note that Riverbend does not post merely the comments and feedback of readers who approve of her blog and her politics. She also posts information from readers who express opposing views, including those who send her hate mail, fraught with ad hominem attacks. For instance, she posts the comments of a reader who tells her she should be grateful that Donald Rumsfeld is in power because he is a compassionate man and because if he, the reader, had been in power at the time, he would have ‘vaporized [the Iraqis] ten minutes after the Trade center attacks’ (Riverbend 2005: 53). Riverbend acknowledges that there is something positive about receiving such an email – a reminder of ‘the diversity of blog readers’ who ‘take time off of watching Fox News to check out [her] blog’ (ibid.: 53).

Riverbend’s blog efforts may be seen as manifestations of the challenges and intimidations that women especially face online, and they bring to mind current articles on the importance of women’s participation in the cyber world despite all intimidation. ‘Women can and should learn more about their online environment so they can exert more control over their corner of cyberspace,’ writes Stephanie Brail. ‘The move of many women to create mailing lists and online services is a positive one. Rather than playing the victim, we can take charge and fight back with the same tools being used against us’ (2003: 154). Furthermore, the ease with which Riverbend navigates technology – proudly calling herself a ‘Girl Geek,’ who can uncover cyber tricks primarily employed by male hackers who try to steal her identity and taint her site – manifests her empowerment, a digital empowerment that many feminists emphasize today. ‘Now, what we will need,’ writes Karen Coyle, ‘is a conspiracy of sisters that begins with the recognition that there is nothing inherently masculine about computers. We must learn to read the computer culture for the myth that it is ... and we start it all with a simple thought that could be the beginning of a revolution: How hard can it be?’ (1996: 54).

Upon starting her blog, Riverbend wrote: ‘So, this is the beginning for me, I guess. I never thought I’d start my own weblog ... All I could think, every time I wanted to start one was “but who will read it?”’ (Riverbend 2005: 5). She expressed the same apprehension and humility characteristic of progressive subcultures often located at the margins of society and equipped with limited resources. Little did she know that her collection would ultimately gain a relatively wide readership, let alone be published in a book with blurbs by Susan Sarandon. While Baghdad Burning has not really infiltrated the mass media yet, its increasing popularity today – at least among academics, political activists, and journalists – is certainly a step forward in making ‘the globe a habitable home,’ where individuals from different geographical regions, especially women, can establish
connections and mobilize other activists in their struggle for justice (Eisenstein 1998: 168).

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10 'Rallying public opinion' and other misuses of feminism

JENNIFER L. FLURI

In this essay, I critique the gendering of military discourses and violent action by the USA in Afghanistan through analysis of documents from the US Congress pre- and post-9/11. The trope of ‘saving’ Afghan women resonated within Congress and became an effective method for ‘rallying public opinion’ and congressional support for US confrontation with the Taliban, the Sunni Islamist and tribal Pashtun nationalist movement in Afghanistan, and the subsequent US military action in that country. My critique does not deny the systematic marginalization and abuse of women under the Taliban; rather my analysis traces the misuse and overuse of the ‘saving and/or protecting women’ trope in Afghanistan to support and legitimize US military violence – without a corresponding congressional-level understanding of the longitudinal and systemic outgrowths of this violence, which is both gendered and particularly significant for many vulnerable populations in Afghanistan.

Women, gender, and violence

Men’s and women’s experiences of violence during military conflicts are often shaped by gender and intersected by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, location and/or dislocation (Giles and Hyndman 2004). Multidimensional approaches to research on gender, conflict, and dislocation are required in order to thoroughly examine the complicated and shifting gender identities women and men experience in conflict zones or in flight from these zones (see Hans 2004). Essentialist definitions of masculinity and femininity are a hallmark of military violence, which often evolve into more distinct categories as military conflicts escalate (Tuval-Davis 1997). These gendered stereotypes are both reinforced and, in some cases, altered for the purpose of powerful political actors (Goldstein 1995). For example, the ‘saving women’ trope extends a legitimate reason for waging violence: conflict, while marginalizing women as political and social agents. This solidifies men's roles as both perpetrator and protector in the shaping or implementing of military violence (see Enloe 1993).

Military violence corresponds with combat masculinity, which is
21 | Feminism and war: stopping militarizers, critiquing power

CYNTHIA ENLOE

Why think together about ‘feminism and war’? Why not be satisfied just with using the frame of ‘gender and war’? I’m sure the hard-working, hard-thinking editors of this book didn’t make the title choice casually. They knew what they were doing. But do the rest of us?

Consciously choosing to ask feminist questions about wars goes well beyond exploring masculinities and femininities, i.e. gender. Asking feminist questions goes beyond even thinking about women and war. Using a feminist curiosity does call on us to engage in both of these explorations – and neither is easy – but it pushes us to go farther, to investigate power.

A feminist enquiry into anything entails, first, being curious about the creations of meanings for masculinities and femininities; second, taking seriously the conditions, ideas and actions of diverse women, but also; third, always tracking down what sorts of power are at work, in whose hands, and with what consequences. True, being a feminist investigator takes stamina.

It really is difficult for war-preparing and war-waging governments to militarize women in their roles as mothers. And it is, after all, not chiefly generals who try to militarize mothers and motherhood. It is civilians who are the principal militarizers. But the good news is militarizing mothers is quite hard work; it takes a lot of effort, ongoing effort. And often the militarizers fail.

I remember being in Aberdeen, Scotland, back in the late 1970s. At this point I was not yet thinking feminist thoughts. I was interested in race and ethnicity – especially as experienced by and manipulated by men. In the 1970s, I was trying to track governments around the world – the American, but also the Canadian, the British, Iraqi, Israeli, Filipino, Brazilian, Belgian, and Soviet – as each tried to wield ideas about ethnicity and race in order to create and sustain their own state militaries. So I was up in Aberdeen, Scotland, seeking to understand how Scottish identity was used to recruit young Scottish men into the British military. One day still sticks in my memory. I spent this day with a hapless British military recruiter as he spent hours trying to persuade one Scottish mother to let her only son join one of the Highland regiments. This was a time when the offshore oil boom was beginning in Scotland. A lot of young Scottish men saw their futures as successful, many Scottish men furthered not by serving in the historic Scottish regiments of the British army but by working for a multinational corporation on a North Sea oil rig.

Back then I wasn’t smart enough to give a lot of thought to this young Scottish man’s mother; I didn’t even ask to interview her to find out why she was so wary of her son joining the regiment. The army recruiter devoted an entire day just trying to persuade this one woman that she’d be practicing good mothering if she permitted her son to join the regiment. I think eventually she held out. The British state had failed. A less than fully militarized mothering had prevailed.

Nowadays, the US Defense Department’s recruiting command officials refer to mothers as among the group they call the ‘influencers.’ Among the ‘influencers’ they include high-school athletic coaches, high-school guidance counselors, clergy, mothers and fathers. These are the people who recruitment strategists believe have the greatest sway over the perceptions and aspirations of teenagers, especially teenage young men. American recruiters targeting ‘influencers’ are focused overwhelmingly on those who can shape the aspirations and dreams of young men.

Persuading young women to think positively about enlisting in the military matters to these recruiting strategists, but they see young women chiefly as ‘fillers.’ Women are recruited today mainly to fill up 15 percent of the US active duty ranks and 24 percent of the National Guard ranks (less of the marines, more of the air force), because currently in the USA it is young women who are more likely than young men to complete high school, and today’s US soldiering requires the skills that come with completing a secondary education. Still, it is young men that recruiters must enlist to make up 85 percent of their quotas. So it is the ‘influencers’ in these young men’s lives about whom the recruiters must think.

Coaches, mothers, fathers, pastors and guidance counselors, take note: you are on the Pentagon’s collective mind.

Recruiting strategists believe that influencing a woman who is a mother is not the same as influencing a man who is a father. That is, they believe they have to play on notions of a father’s expectations of a son’s desired masculinity, which are likely to be different from a mother’s expectation of a son’s masculinity if a recruiter is to persuade each to encourage, or at least allow, their son to enlist. The US Defense Department today probably hires and contracts more social scientists than any other American public institution. This military reliance on – and
co-optation of – social science researchers began during World War II when officials were anxious about keeping the civilian public’s support of a drawn-out war and about sustaining morale among the country’s own soldiers. Today sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists all play parts in persuading American mothers that what is good for their mothering is to persuade their teenage sons – or at least agree to their sons’ wishes – to join the military.

If militarizing mothers was just a ‘walk in the park,’ it would not take all this strategizing, all this research, all this persuasion, all this co-optation of social scientists.

The good news is that it does take that much effort. The US Defense Department is today one of the largest clients of American civilian advertising agencies. Because advertising agencies see winning Pentagon recruiting contracts as so profitable, one way to chart militarization in the United States today is to read Advertising Age or the advertising business sections of local city newspapers. It has been the end of the male military ‘draft’ – what most people in the world refer to as conscription – in Canada, the United States, Britain, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Belgium and the Netherlands which has helped to militarize civilian advertising agencies. Military recruiting officials need the skills of civilian ad executives to reach potential recruits and their ‘influencers.’ Then the advertisements that these agencies are producing and their selection of stories for these ads are sophisticated; they draw on the last eighty years of research into the art of mass persuasion.

Perhaps you have seen one recent US television ad aimed specifically at mothers of sons. We first see a middle-aged African-American woman – now these are actors, of course – sitting in her kitchen. It’s the afternoon. She is working at the kitchen table doing her bills. The ad agency and the Pentagon recruiting command have chosen to place this television ad in an afternoon programming slot, between the reruns of Law and Order and Judging Amy. This is not an ad designed for Monday Night Football viewers. It is a feminized advertising strategy. Actually, I saw this ad while having a late lunch at my favorite downtown cafe, and it was mainly retired guys at the bar who were watching it. So, the Defense Department hasn’t quite got their gender television profiling correct yet. But, returning to the ad itself: as the African-American woman is working at her kitchen table, in walks a very attractive-looking, late teenage African-American fellow, who quite clearly is the woman’s son. He says, ‘Mom, I think I’ve figured it out. I think I’m going to join the army.’ Now this is an ad from 2006. It’s year three of the US military’s war in Iraq. The camera moves to a close-up of the mother’s face. She just raises her eyebrows, obviously quite skeptical. Her son responds, ‘No, Mom, look, we’ve been trying to figure out how I can go to college. I think ... I think this will do it.’ She is shown remaining unconvinced. So then the narrator playing her teenage son delivers his scripted punchline, caring son to caring mother: ‘But, Mom, it’s about time I became a man.’

That Defense Department ad was based on women’s presumed maternal anxieties about sons’ education and sons’ manliness in the early twenty-first century. It should prompt us to devote serious thought – research, writing, teaching, activism – to the ways in which any society mixes the chemistry of mater care, anxieties about masculinity, the costs of gaining higher education and political manipulation in the lives of individual women.

Power wielded to construct – and inculcate – particular meanings of masculinity and femininity is integral not just to waging war itself, but to making pre-war preparations for the waging of war. Power is, furthermore, wielded to determine which ideas about masculinities and which ideas about femininities will dominate the narratives of that war long after that war is over. That is, a feminist curiosity prompts us to pay close attention to the power at work in pre-war years and wartime years and post-war years. And post-war power-wielding and contests over constructions of masculinities and femininities allegedly driving the past can go on for generations. Not just our anticipations of war can be militarized in our lives as women and as men, but so too can our memories and our retold stories. And lots of people with power have a stake in shaping our anticipations, our memories and our stories. Just listen to the intensity of current debates among Japanese over World War II practices of sexual slavery sixty years ago. Or think of the mixed messages young American women today are sending to their friends by donning ‘Rosie the Riveter’ T-shirts: messages about US women gaining strength by answering the government’s call to sign up to be wartime industrial workers helping to wage that same war. Even better, think about both of these memory contests – about Japan’s ‘comfort women’ and about ‘Rosie the Riveter’ – going on simultaneously today, six decades after that war.

Using our feminist analytical skills we can reveal how power is used to construct certain kinds of ideas about masculinity and particular ideas about motherhood, to privilege certain ideas about the ‘good wife,’ and particular ideas about the ‘dutiful daughter,’ the ‘faithful girlfriend,’ and the ‘liberated woman.’ That power-wielding is most effective when the women and men in any militarized society think that these ideas are free floating, out there in the shared culture, not crafted, not inculcated. But war wagers who don’t gain control over the popular notions of these
standards of masculinity and femininity prior to the launch of a military action will find it harder both to legitimize and to wage a war – and to keep alive positive memories of past wars. Any revelation of conscious intent can put a dent in accepted patriarchal militarized ideas.

It takes feminist digging to bring the workings of power in the militarization of masculinities and femininities up into the light where we can all examine the alternatives. Only by bringing the power wielded to militarize gendered meanings up to the surface can we make militarizing processes at work in our society visible – and thereby open to challenge.

Even though we here in the USA – and in Afghanistan and in Iraq – are immersed in these current wars, even now we should be thinking about the politics of post-war eras. Post-war can be a time that's still defined by war. We can learn from women who are doing the very hard post-war feminist organizing in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, the Congo, Liberia, Serbia, East Timor, Liberia, Nepal, Cambodia, Viet Nam and Northern Ireland. Feminists in each of these countries today are working to reconstruct social institutions and rituals and shared stories in ways that do not re-create militarized ideas about – and practices of – the heroic veteran, the sacrificing mother, the loyal girlfriend. To leave these unchallenged, to fail in creating demilitarized alternatives, is to be complicit in planting the seeds for the next war. Women activist thinkers in Rwanda, Nepal and Liberia can be our tutors.

We need to find ways to listen to those grassroots organizers who right now are using feminist ideas to make sure that post-war is not as militarized and patriarchal as pre-war. It requires, these activist women tell us, stamina, imagination, compasssion, gritty realism, acute attentiveness at multiple levels of one's society and internationally as well – and, of course, lots of listening. These smart thinkers keep their eyes on doctors treating (or ignoring) post-traumatic stress disease (PTSD); judges deciding on domestic violence cases; social workers seeing women and girls who have survived wartime rape; television producers choosing what dramas and news stories to feature; police recruiters; political parties' electoral strategists; school textbook adopters; legislators drafting inheritance laws; officials tempted to award job training only to demobilized military and insurgent veterans. Every one of them, if not monitored and challenged, can turn into post-war militarizers of masculinity and femininity.

Today we can look outside the USA to learn how to think more clearly about this potentially militarizing chemistry in women's lives – pre-war, during a war and in the tenuous post-war peace. Americans are absolutely not the smartest people in the world today when it comes to feminist exploring – and acting upon explorations of – the militarizations of masculinities and femininities. In Turkey, South Korea, Serbia, Italy, Spain, Colombia, Cyprus, Rwanda, Sweden, Australia, Sri Lanka, Israel, India, Nepal and Japan there are women's groups informed by feminist thinking whose members can be our tutors. Some of these groups do their thinking and activism without much outside notice or support. Other groups are loosely connected through such international feminist networks as Women Living Under Muslim Law, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Women Waging Peace, Women Living in Conflict Zones Network (WICZNET) and Women in Black. Some US women belong to each of these networks, but none of them is US-dominated. The American women associated with each are the learners.

We here in the USA can join a lively international feminist conversation about how militarizers make the militarization of loyalty, liberation, sacrifice and care so appealing to diverse women. We as Americans, even if we have developed a conscious feminist curiosity, remain the underdeveloped ones in today's world. Yet, precisely because we are members of a society that has become so profoundly militarized in part by the successful wieldings of certain masculinities and certain femininities, perhaps today our ears are wider open than they've ever been before. Maybe now we can hear, we can learn more intently and intensely than we ever have.

What so many thoughtful, energetic feminists in other countries have shown us is that militarizers have to work very, very hard to militarize us as mothers, as workers, as activists, as teachers, as students, as consumers, as friends, partners, and girlfriends. Militarization cannot be launched or sustained without women's contributions and women's complicity. That means we, as women, have a lot to withhold. That's a hopeful feminist revelation.
In commemoration of those moments when we make prosaic state-
ments that end up sounding poetic and then we are reminded that
ordinary human dialogue is often punctuated with poetry.

Refrain: One day!
One day, we shall rescue our lives from precarious peripheral hanging
on and assume the center of historical action. We shall explore
every avenue that runs through our lives and create live-roads
that know no dead ends, extending them to the limits of human
destination. We shall put an angry fullstop to the negation of
our human rights.

One day!
One day, we shall undertake a second journey along the bushy path
of denied human development, chasing away the wild beasts
that prowl the route of our narrow survival lest they make a
complete jungle of our already bestialized lives. We shall then
cultivate a huge global garden and plant it with the seed of
true humanity.

One day!
One day, we shall emerge from the wings and occupy the center stage
in full visibility, refusing to be observers and understudies
who wait behind the curtain of living drama. We shall liberate
the word and become its uterers, no longer cheer crowds
or ululators who spur on and applaud the molestors of our
affirmative speech.

One day!
One day, we shall explode the negative silences and paralyzing terror
imposed upon us by the tyranny of dominating cultures and
their languages of conquest. We shall discover the authentic
voices of our self-naming and renaming, reclaiming our role
as composers, speaking for ourselves, because we too have
tongues, you know!

One day!
One day, we shall make a bonfire of currently dismantling and maladjust-
ing economic structural adjustment programs, then engage in
the restructuring process, producing coherence around our
scattered daily existence till it is full to bursting. We shall stop
at nothing short of holding the sun to a standstill until the
job is complete.

One day!
One day, we shall move the sun of our existence so that it truly rises
from the east of our lives, reaching its noon at the center of
our needs. We shall then release it to set in the west of our
perverted and dominated history, never to rise again until it
learns to shine upon the masses of global being, not on islands
of pirated living.

One day!
One day, we shall exterminate the short distance between the kitchen
and bedroom of our lives, storm out of the suffocating space
between the factory and the overseer of our exploited creative
labor, paving a path that leads to the buried mines of our
suppressed human potential. We shall walk it if it stretches
unto eternity.

One day!
One day, we shall celebrate this earth as our home, standing tall and
short, boasting of the abundance and multifariousness of our
fulfilled human visions. We shall not look to the sky waiting for
unfulfilled prophecies. We shall upturn the very rocks of our
enforced stony existence, converting them into fluvial banks of
life sustenance.

One day!