



Anti-Feminist Backlash and Violence against Women Worldwide

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Summary

Although globalization, through the communications revolution and international law, brings the promise of progressive social change, the concern of this paper is with the backlash against women's increasing emancipation, a backlash that is evidenced in the United States through making a mockery of women's bid for equality by turning the principles against some women whose lives are troubled while rewarding others. Meanwhile across the world the victimization of women, personal and cultural, is taking place in both democratic and totalitarian regimes. Two related forms of backlash are institutional and personal. That forces from the global market and the corporate media help fuel this backlash is a major contention of this paper.

In our examination of the world's war against women, let us look first at how it is played out in a nation that has long touted women's equality. The guiding theoretical framework for the present paper is Susan Faludi's concept of backlash. My aim is to develop this concept further by discussing two forms of backlash against women in the world today — (1) institutional or politically based backlash and (2) the war against women that operates at the more personal level. Let us look first at Faludi's (1991) theoretical contribution.

The publication of Faludi's insightful *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* was a defining moment for many women in the United States and even a turning point for some. Because so much attention had been focused in the media and elsewhere on women's progress, few made note of the unintended consequences. Fewer still even noticed a counter movement, the decidedly anti-intellectual thrust that was also strongly anti-feminist. It was a case where what was pointed out was suddenly obvious; only then did this awareness strike home.

Backlash, as Faludi indicates, is borne out of success; one party makes claims, advances and another party feels left out, resentful threatened. Faludi argues that the anti-feminist backlash has been set off not by women's achievement of full equality but by the increased possibility that they might win it. It is a pre-emptive strike that stops women long before their goals are achieved. She describes the "countercurrents and treacherous undertows" of the backlash — which are highly effective in that even those who see themselves as feminists can be dragged down by them. "This counterassault," writes Faludi (1991, p. xviii), "stands the truth boldly on its head and proclaims that the very steps that have elevated women's position have actually led to their downfall." Liberation, as Faludi further suggests, has now become the true American scourge. Just when women's quest for equal rights had started to gain ground with extensive affirmative action programs in place; just when women had joined the ranks of virtually all the male dominated and prestigious and even macho professions; just when laws protecting rape victims and battered women from being belittled and attacked in court, almost

predictably an antifeminist resistance set in. For everyone or two steps forward, there has been one step back.

Among the steps backward: the highly coercive social welfare policies and a resurgence in the previously discounted myth of the “new female criminal” that we have seen above; attempts to stymie to women’s reproductive freedom; the use of anti-conspiracy laws to punish the wives and partners of drug dealers for their role in perpetrating or covering up crime; and finally, extensive press coverage of domestic violence statistics which purport to show that women initiate violence against their partners as often as men do. We can say, in short, that efforts are underway to punish women, both biologically and legally. And we can also note that the phenomenon that Susan Faludi spotted and documented as early as 1991 was to grow much more pronounced in the years that followed.

Institutional Backlash in Historical Context

Institutional or *political backlash* is a phenomenon that occurs when a movement in one direction is countered by resistance from forces that fear change from another direction. With social change, resentments and animosities build up. These feelings are played out in mysterious and unpredictable, sometimes undetectable, ways. Political backlash eras have long been a fixture of American public life, from Reconstruction after the Civil War to the McCarthy era of the 1950s (Chesney-Lind 2006). The first wave of a political backlash against mothers receiving welfare aid occurred during the 1940s and 1950s. The reaction against the welfare system coincided with the declining numbers of recipients among white widows and the greater access to aid among black, single mothers. Ellen Reese (2005) in *Backlash against Welfare Mothers* recounts the pendulum swings in U.S. society tied in to economic conditions and prevailing ideologies. Racism was a factor as well. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, in reaction to advances associated with the civil rights movement and with the public image of “welfare queens” as black women taking advantage of the system, many members of the white working class expressed resentment. The affirmative action policies, such as those that were introduced during this era, are especially prone to backlash because these strategies benefit one group of people over others and because they involve a challenge to entrenched belief systems (about gender roles and “merit”).

The period of the 1980s through the rest of the 20th Century was characterized by the ascendancy of corporate business interests and of the conservative Right. In the United States, the anti-welfare movement culminated in the Personal Responsibility Act of 1996. Poor single mothers, according to Jimenez (1999) were demonized in this legislation. Congressional hearings which preceded the passage of the act bolstered by uncharitable media accounts linked welfare mothers with crimes ranging from child abuse, to raising juvenile delinquents, to a lack of the ability to delay gratification. Under the new laws that were passed, single mothers on welfare have been forced to look for work. The backlash line accused the women’s movement of going too far employment-wise at the expense of neglect of their families, and yet, at the same time, representatives in Congress pushed through budget cuts to remove any maternal programming that might have helped single mothers with small children get by without working outside the home.

From an economic perspective, the impact of market-driven measures of capitalism is causing the reduction of female-oriented social services through cut-backs, privatization of services, and the de-professionalization of workers. At the same time, global market forces pave the way for social service agency consolidation and corporate management techniques with the result that men displace women managers (Dominelli 2002). In the current backlash climate,

the opportunity is being seized by right wing constituents to reduce funding for feminist-based social services. This is happening in Britain (Dominelli 2002) and Canada (Barnoff, George, and Coleman 2006) as well as in the U.S. The loss of welfare benefits and services by the state, in conjunction with de-institutionalization of mental patients, in turn, has increased the numbers of homeless young people roaming the streets; this fact has intensified the vulnerability of girls and women to sexual victimization, sexual exploitation, and drug use. A parallel reduction in funding for victim assistance services and women's shelters has been pronounced.

The erosion of social service benefits in the welfare state has been matched in the criminal justice system by the passage of draconian laws against drug use and the mass building of medium and maximum security prisons nationwide. The personal targets of the attack include racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, women on welfare, and users of illicit drugs. Within the criminal justice system, the anti-feminist, anti-minority-rights backlash is disguised through various code words such as equality, family values, and the war on drugs. In the writing of new mandatory sentencing laws and laws related to women's reproductive functions, the patriarchy has joined with conservative politicians to reinforce class, gender, and race privilege. America's war on drugs is sometimes referred to as a war on poor and minority women. Over the past decade or so, in the U.S., the number of women in prison has doubled, and the rate of increase of female prisoners has been approximately twice the rate of the increase of men in prison.

The Anti-Feminist Backlash and Reproductive Freedoms

Much of Faludi's (1991) focus was on the movement to restrict a woman's right to abortion. This movement has scored a number of victories since *Backlash* was published. Because a woman's right to control of her own body at times may conflict with the interests of a developing fetus and later child, the subject of reproductive freedom is one in which the antifeminist movement has chalked up success after success. Historically, abortion law reform in the United States was consistent with the new definition of womanhood, a definition acknowledging a woman's right to control over her own body, a right was considered primary. Antifeminist, anti-abortion forces, bolstered by a heavily funded right wing religiously oriented crusade and new technology able to track the sounds and movements of the embryo/fetus launched a highly effective mass media campaign.

The restriction in federal funding for abortions, as always, has brought a disproportionate effect to bear on poor and minority women. Internationally, the American Right to Life movement has been successful in preventing ratification of human rights conventions because of the refusal of international bodies to protect the rights of children "born and unborn" as well as in jeopardizing the funding of family planning programs worldwide. The loss of funding for these family planning programs has been devastating in AIDS prevention efforts throughout Africa, and many lives have been lost as a result.

The passage of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 2003 is the first time Congress has ever specifically banned a medical procedure. This legislation, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists is inappropriate and dangerous because it neglects concerns for the mother's health (*The Harvard Crimson* 2003). Under the guise of protecting the fetus from harm, the prosecution of drug-addicted mothers is a part of an alarming trend toward greater state intervention in the lives of pregnant women (van Wormer and Davis 2008). Clearly the impetus to punish is the driving force here, inasmuch as post-pregnancy prosecution does little to protect the unborn child.

Backlash and the Punishment of Female Offenders

Resistance to feminism and to women's bid for equality is played out worldwide not only in religious fundamentalism but also in a backlash that accuses feminism of promoting anti-family ideologies that threaten the well-being of children and communities.

Welfare women, pregnant out-of-wedlock women, mothers with drug problems, female offenders, and even, to some extent, battered women (whose plausibility is being undermined): all are singled out for the new medicine. The message was loud and clear: the day of entitlements for many welfare services is over; women are now equal and most work (regardless of child care responsibilities) was echoed in the halls of justice where the message was, "You as the equal of a man will be punished like a man."

Few female offenders are feminist and fewer still have benefited in any tangible way from the various affirmative action programs which have helped women advance up the ladder of the prestigious and academic professions.

As compassion takes a back seat in a punitive society, women connected to crime through family ties—mothers who protect their drug dealing children, wives and girlfriends of drug using men, for example—are now subjected to punishment under the "strong arm of the law." Chesney-Lind and Pollack (1994) deemed this trend, "equality with a vengeance." More recently, Chesney-Lind (2006) uses the term "vengeful equity" to refer to the gender blind treatment of women by the major institutions of society.

Among some striking examples of punitive policies pertaining that are especially relevant to poor and minority women in the U.S. are the following:

- the social construction in the mass media of the "new female criminal," the typical variety of which is a drug-dependent mother who lives in the inner-city and got swooped up in an anti-drug operation;
- conspiracy drug laws that are used to incarcerate large numbers of the female partners of drug dealers;
- the passage and enforcement of fetal abuse statutes which criminalize maternal drug use
- increase in the incarceration rates of drug using women that is significantly greater than the increase for men;
- new adoption laws that remove all custody rights from mothers in prison who are serving lengthy sentences;
- use of dual arrest laws to arrest both partners in domestic violence situations;
- laws that persons convicted of drug offenses cannot receive welfare aid.

While gender-neutral policies have dumped single mothers off the welfare rolls, gender-neutral mandatory sentencing for drug law violation has brought unprecedented numbers of women and especially black women into prison. Equality for these women subjects them to discipline according to the male model without allowance for their motherhood roles or their

history of personal victimization. A flawed notion lurks beneath the current policies: the assumption that women have achieved full equality and that men are suffering the consequences. The backlash is felt most by the women least able to take advantage of the new professional opportunities and the least feminist identified.

This vengeful equity phenomenon comes into play most concretely in the correctional arena. This fact is seen in connection with the masculinization of correctional services and standardization of treatment philosophies. The bulk of the funding here has gone to high-tech security systems and to surveillance rather than to educational and counseling services. Consistent with the new mythology, the rate of construction of women's prisons now exceeds the male rate. And in accordance with the new thinking on female criminality, these structures are designed according to the male model of high-security fortresses; such facilities now are often male-run and male-administered with predictable results. The fact that the majority of women in confinement have been convicted of nonviolent, mostly drug-related offenses tends to be overlooked. The media demonization of the new violent female, especially young girls in trouble with the law, further aggravates the female offender's plight.

Media Coverage of Female Crime

Because feminism is yesterday's story, and there's always the incentive to come up with something new or to put a new spin on things, challenges to feminist thought are given prime coverage and their proponents elevated to star status on the talk shows. Popular literature echoes the contemporary sentiment, and, in reflecting on it, reinforces it.

The mass media both reflect and shape the climate of opinion. Driven by market imperatives (crime sells) and unprecedented competition from multiple news sources, especially related television and newspaper news editors are under pressure to produce fear-generated, sensationalized stories. The mass media, therefore, are playing a role, unwittingly or not in putting down the feminist movement.

The focus of the media hype has shifted from the "gansta girl" to the "violent girl" to the mean girl" (Chesney-Lind 2006). *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* is a best-selling book by Rachel Simmons (2005). The focus on "bad girls" still persists. (See for example, the *Newsweek* article, "Girls Gone Bad?" Deveny 2007). Such media hype, as Chesney-Lind suggests, has created a "self-fulfilling prophecy" that has had dramatic effects on girls' arrests, detentions, and referrals to juvenile courts. Racial discrimination is certainly a factor here as African American and other marginalized females are disproportionately oppressed under harsh enforcement of the law.

Media focus regarding boys has not been about crime rates but about the supposed ramifications of the feminist-inspired focus on girls special needs which has led to the neglect of boys' needs. Media coverage of the discovery of boys' problems in school and elsewhere has been immense. (See for example, "The Boy Crisis," Cover, *Newsweek*, 2006.)

The "boy crisis" journalism is thought to be a backlash to legal remedies to ensure equality in education for girls. A report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, aptly called "The Truth about Boys and Girls" strives to set the record straight by examining data over the past 30 years. The boy crisis, as the report states, has been used by conservative authors who accuse "misguided feminists" of lavishing resources on female students at the expense of males and by liberal authors who are critical of pedagogical practices (Mathews 2006). A more recent study on gender equity in education by the American Association of

University Women refutes the boys-crisis argument in their analysis of data from college entrance exams and other measures of achievement (Strauss 2008).

Meanwhile, the contemporary media focus on male victimization and female violence does not help the situation of women's rights. In response to a negative portrayal in the media of the mothers of the women's movement, the younger generation now spurns the term feminism itself.

Claims that Women Are as Violent as Men

The shift in direction evidenced in criminal law and sentencing is paralleled in a turnabout in domestic violence research with a new focus on the victimization of males by female perpetrators. Minaker and Snider demonstrate how the very successes of feminism, combined with neo-conservative governance, the burgeoning power of men's movements and new communications media, have given rise to a frightening turnabout in national ideologies and practices. In their words:

"Wife battering" - the original problem constituted by 1970s feminists--has morphed into "domestic violence" and then into "husband abuse." The husband-abuse argument runs counter to decades of feminist research, theory, and activism. One of the battered women's movement's key goals was to challenge the silence over woman abuse and decrease public tolerance of it. With the proliferation of "husband abuse" discourse, feminist assumptions, research evidence, and claims—that women are more likely to be injured, that women are murdered at three times the rate of men, and that, when separated, they are eight times as likely to be killed ...are under attack. ...The claim that spousal abuse is a gender-neutral phenomenon has become the new "common sense," the dominant lens used by policy makers, media, and influential interest groups.

To understand how and why this has happened, "husband abuse" must be situated in the social, economic, and political milieu that produced it and that reinforces it to this day. This article demonstrates how the very successes of feminism, combined with neo-liberal governance, the burgeoning power of men's movements, and new communication media, have given rise to new subjects, mentalities, and practices. (p.755)

Buttell and Carney (2005), in their edited anthology, *Women Who Perpetuate Relationship Violence*, exemplify just what the critics above have noted. Their purpose, as stated in the book is "to strip away political correctness and take a frank look at the issues surrounding female violence in intimate relationship" (p. xvi). The first offering by Canadian social scientists Dutton, Nicholls, and Spidel cites study after study from the North American social science literature purportedly to show that women initiate violence as much as men. The authors made the same mistake as the North American media in basing their conclusion that women are more violent than men from survey data gathered in the 1980s that relied on an instrument, the Conflict Tactics Scale that asked the number of times they had slapped, kicked or otherwise hit a partner. This instrument is problematic because its exclusive focus is on acts performed rather than on the context in which the slapping, kicking, etc. occurred.

Women's bid for equality has been turned against mothers on welfare and female offenders in the United States who have had to pay the price for the male resentment against their more liberated sisters. Even some victims, such as battered women are suffering from tendencies to undermine their claims. Paternalistic treatment of women in the courts of law has been replaced with gender neutral treatment and mandatory sentencing according to the offense

without any consideration of context. This is called the equality-with-a-vengeance stance. This strategy is very clever, because it effectively silences feminists who have fought so hard for equality. So even when female offenders are locked up in medium security prisons and training schools and even sent to boot camps, some feminists are loath to complain. In the belief that they can't have it both ways—be the equals of men and request special treatment for the weaker sex—the women's movement was slow to respond. So as the message echoed through the halls of justice: "As the equal of a man, you will be punished like a man," sympathetic observers did little to help. Inhibited by their equality stance, feminists were caught off guard, and they failed to raise their voices in any organized and meaningful way.

Consistent with the strategy of using feminism's rhetoric against women, offending women have been locked up with a wild abandon, and the traditional, campus-like correctional settings have been replaced with modern razor wire, high tech-security systems, and militaristic, male-run regimes. What you have today, then, is the confinement of women in fortress-style prisons designed for the incarceration of dangerous men. The one-style-fits-all, gender-neutrality approach has brought its effect to bear in other areas as well, namely in child custody battles, roles for women in the military, and domestic violence complaints.

This issue of whether to fight for gender equality or for special treatment is an issue that still is not completely resolved: To what extent should men and women receive identical treatment under the law or to what extent should allowances be made for their differences? If allowance is made in one sphere—punishment for crime—what will be the unintended consequences elsewhere—in employment opportunities, for example? Until reformers are able to build some consensus on this dilemma, the dilemma of equality versus differential treatment, many of the horrors engendered by the present system will persist.

Fortunately, some feminist criminologists have exposed the hoax that they have correctly named "equality with a vengeance." They have also gone beyond the statistics to examine the true nature of girls' and women's offending. Gradually, the realization has struck prison reformers that equality of opportunity does not have to mean sameness; and advocacy for gender-sensitive treatment is being well received in many quarters.

Anti-Feminist Developments Globally

In Britain an anti-feminist backlash is evidenced in a counter-reaction to women's advances, a glamorization of the alpha male. As an article in *The Economist* (2001) tells us, "Laddishness, which exploded in Britain in the 1990s with the boom in sales of magazines such as *Loaded*, *FHM*, and *Maxim*, unapologetically celebrates heterosexual hedonism and a defiant fecklessness" (p. 34).

In France as in Canada, a backlash against sex assault victims and battered women due to lobbying by fathers' rights groups is making headway. Capitalizing on anti-feminist sentiment, this Internet-linked men's rights movement is reshaping domestic violence and family law policies across the Western world (Laidler and Mann 2008). Arguments from this movement based on the importance of fathers in the family are undermining supports for women victims in the U.S. and abroad. Knowledge of how the backlash works is important in order to contribute to efforts to counter its impact. French feminists have had to fight to ward off mandatory joint custody legislation; the proposed law would have placed battered women at risk (Dufresne 2002). A related issue concerns child custody cases. Accusations of "malicious mother syndrome" or "parental alienation syndrome" are being used in France and

North America by men to gain custody in cases in which mothers claim that their husbands are violent.

Latin America has not been immune from a counter-reaction to strides made by feminists. The emergence of a backlash movement has resulted due to the impact of both domestic and global politics, according to Kampwirth (2006). From a domestic perspective, the movement can be seen as a reaction against the Sandinista revolution and its aftermath. From a global perspective, it is a response to what antifeminists see as the challenges of globalization such as feminist successes in international development agencies and the loss of sovereignty due to neoliberalism. This anti-feminist movement is also a response to the opportunities provided by globalization such as the emergence of a global antifeminist movement with strong links to like-minded organizations in other countries.

The history of the resurgence of radical Islamism in the Middle East, can be construed as a reaction against modernity and feminism in the West. Today many countries of the Middle East are engaged in a titanic struggle between the forces of modernization and theocracy. In Iran, for example, as women were becoming more and more liberated, a revolution sought to return women to the roles they had played in Medieval times (Yang 2005).

Globalization and Women's Rights

Two kinds of backlash are the concern of this paper. The first is *institutional backlash* which operates at the societal level, typically in laws that are written or enacted as a reaction against progress by a minority group. This type of backlash operates at the macro level and is cultural. Welfare mothers with small children, pregnant out-of-wedlock women, mothers with drug problems, female offenders, and even, to some extent, battered women (whose plausibility is being undermined): all are singled out for stringent measures of social control.

The second kind of backlash with which we were concerned in this article is *personal backlash*. This form of attack is often a form of displaced aggression onto another person such as a family member. Interpersonal violence is of this type. Such an attack, as, for example, partner violence, may have its origins in external stresses that may be economic or work related. Both institutional (macro) and personal (micro) forms of backlash, whether at the macro or micro level, are cultural in origin and derive from basic prejudice against girls and women, and against women and minorities who are seen as competitive with white men and therefore threatening. Resentment against the progress of affirmative action in western countries is matched by resistance to these democratic ideals in totalitarian nations. In the Western part of the world, new laws that remove old protections have been introduced in combination with budget cuts of feminist-based services, while in the Middle East, old laws restricting women's freedom have been reintroduced.

The study of the victimization of women is incomplete without a consideration of the treatment of women worldwide and of the impact of global market economics on that treatment, whether directly or indirectly. The revolution in communication technologies, this phenomenon that is drawing the world in closer and closer is one significant factor affecting the lives of women. Globalization can be looked at in a number of contexts, both positive and negative, that are relevant to women in the world today. From a positive standpoint, women of the world are uniting individually through the Internet and collectively through international organizations and conventions. Opportunities for women have expanded, especially in Asian countries, through outsourcing of white collar jobs from the West. At the same time, the exchange of information about lifestyles and women's roles has raised the

consciousness of educated women across the globe. Internationally, women have organized to advocate for human rights in conventions, the most famous of which was that held in China in 1995 at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. It was only after the Beijing conference, in fact, that Amnesty International, the well-known NGO that has done so much to publicize human rights abuses worldwide, took up the call to investigate crimes specifically against women (van Wormer and Bartollas 2007). “Women’s rights are human rights” has become the mantra of this organization. Attention to such issues and to human rights violations today has been catapulted to the forefront of international media concerns.

On the negative side, this commercial “flattening” of the world (see Friedman’s (2005) *The World Is Flat*) has an effect to bear not only on the lowering of trade and political barriers, but on the nature of crime, the passage and enforcement of transnational laws, and, on the victimization of women. According to a conference document of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (Mason 1995), the cultural origins of violence against women (for example, genital mutilation, wife beating, and” honor killings”) are in the historically unequal power relations between men and women.

As we learn from Iowa journalist Rekha Basu (2006) who had recently gained insights from a trip to Ethiopia:

“I came to understand that this intense fear of female sexuality, and by extension, female power and independence, has driven so many harmful traditions from child marriage to genital mutilation, I saw a link between those fears in Africa and the ones that are fueling a backlash against birth control back home, and driving rape, battery and other anti-female violence. And for the umpteenth time, I saw that a country cannot thrive without the full empowerment and engagement of women.” (p. 27)

Indeed, the low social and economic status of women combined with materialism can be both a cause and a consequence of violence against women. Take the dowry bride burnings in India, for example. Dowry bride burning is an illegal custom in which a bride is set on fire by her in-laws if the demands for dowry payment from the bride’s family are unmet. Indian feminists use the term *femicide* to fit the reality of such systematic female-killing in their country. As India has shifted to a market cash economy, the new consumerism has put more value on the size of the dowry itself than on the woman. Another example of the impact of globally based consumerism on crime against women is in the sexual trafficking of girls and women from poor to rich countries. The consequence of such anti-female violence is to destroy girls’ and women’s chances for life and livelihood. The threat of such violence alone keeps women down and subservient in a society.

The general trend toward fundamentalist ideologies in many parts of the world—the East as well as the West—has particular implications for feminist scholarship and analysis (Lewis 2005). In Nicaragua, for example, antifeminism can be viewed as a reaction against the socialist revolution in the 1980s with its liberating impact on women. The nation’s loss of sovereignty and forced compliance with world bank dictates to reduce social benefits are other factors in the anti-feminist ethos that is dominant today (Kampwirth 2006).

The gender impact of “free trade” agreements between rich and poor nations must also be considered. The loss of women’s traditional work in rural areas of the world such as in Latin America and India which are now flooded with cheap agricultural products that are “dumped” from abroad has weakened women’s economic position. Violence against women has

increased paralleling women's decreased value. A detailed study from Kerala, India and other agrarian regions released by the National Commission for Women in New Delhi (reported by Chekkutty 2005).

Increasing global interconnectedness has resulted in social problems that transcend national boundaries (Dominelli 2002). Among these problems are: the plight of women refugees escaping the ravages of war; the mass emigration of immigrants escaping personal and political violence; sex trafficking; and women used as "mules" to transport illegal drugs across borders.

Transnational crime is heightened as a result of global commerce and the power differentials between industrialized and developing nations. The globalization of international markets in conjunction with political changes within nations (for example, the breakdown of socialist protections in nations of the former Soviet Union under emerging capitalism) has made women from these countries particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking and exploitation (Erez 2000; van Wormer and Bartollas 2007).

One important aspect of globalization relates to the clash of civilizations through the communications revolution (Dominelli 2002). Both feminist and anti-feminist ideas and movements are reinforced worldwide by the communications revolution which provides for links to like-minded information spreading from other countries. The fear in certain quarters across the globe is that if women's consciousness is raised, they will demand their rights. A counter-reaction, therefore, has taken place, a backlash by entrenched forces with a vested interest in the status quo. This backlash is especially pronounced in regions of the world where religious fundamentalism has been used to threaten women and suppress them.

Economic competition undoubtedly plays a role in what has been termed the "world's war against women" as well. Worldwide, as competition for well-paying and secure jobs in a global economy heats up, dangerous right-wing extremist movements are seizing political power. The mistreatment of women globally tends to be expressed in the guise of an attack on modernization, including the threatened liberation of women.

Arguably, the volatile situation in much of the Middle East today is related to the clash of civilizations and the fear that women will be corrupted by modern forces stressing democracy and gender equality. The rise of Osama Bin Laden and his alliance with the Taliban warriors can be largely attributed to the clash of cultures that emerged from the first Gulf War when Saudi Arabia experienced the stationing of thousands of men and women in their country. Bin Laden has actively decried the Westernization that took place in Saudi Arabia during those years (Scheuer 2005). Interestingly, the Taliban were able to take over control of Afghanistan following America's defeat of Russian control. Women were the great losers here; their persecution under the Taliban has been as severe as anywhere in the world. The second Gulf War, similarly, brought an effect to bear on women in Kuwait, especially in regard to domestic violence against women that increased significantly (Tetreault 2003).

Economic globalization, or the macro-economic policies associated with the global economy, has important human rights implications. Such policies require that the non-industrialized nations reduce their indebtedness to the world banks through reducing social welfare spending of the kind that makes life livable. Relevant to economic inequities, women perform two-thirds of the world's work but earn only one-tenth of all income; women own less than one-tenth of the world's property (Human Rights Watch 2002). People in a position of economic

servitude to others who have control over the resources are generally vulnerable to mistreatment, and they have little recourse for justice. Economic destitution makes a young woman ripe for sexual exploitation, including being tricked into prostitution with the promise of a lucrative job abroad.

It stands to reason that as the economy improves in a country, more girls are educated, birth control is practiced more widely, women move into the work force, and the lives of women improve, or so the proponents of “free trade” and global economics argue. The United Nations (UN) (2005) in a news report has reversed the proposition in saying that stopping violence against women is the key to eliminating poverty. This is because women who are not terrorized by violence, under circumstances of gender equality, are free to make decisions concerning family size and to access health care for themselves and for their children, including girls, and to thereby reduce incidences of harmful traditional practices. Studies show that when women control the family spending, they are more likely than men to invest a higher percentage of their earnings in family needs (UN 2005). Such inequality as exists today in many countries is in itself a violation of human rights.

Conclusion

The political pendulum tends to swing back and forth as the prevailing ideology of the day is countered by opposing forces. When for example some headway was made toward the emancipation of minority groups and women, the seeds were planted for organized resistance. We see this at the formal level with political parties, and we see this informally in fashion. Each action brings a counterreaction. In times of rapid social change, resentment builds. Unintended consequences of the changes that are made are publicized and resistance builds.

The paradox of the present age is that while women and minorities in the United States have never had it so good, poor women of color face enormous challenges. So while the doors have opened for women to enter the professions of law and medicine, and be a front-running candidate for the presidency, life at the lower echelons of society tells a different story. An anti-feminist backlash is striking out against girls and women who are the most vulnerable in society. That female offenders, like mothers on welfare, are being made to pay for women’s progress toward equality in other areas is a major argument of this article.

Two kinds of backlash have been discussed in this paper—institutionalized and personal. *Institutionalized backlash* operates at the societal level, typically as laws that are written or enacted as a reaction against progress by a minority group. *Personal backlash* may have its origins in social stress or work pressures and is manifest as displaced aggression onto another person such as a family member. Sometimes this backlash takes the form of violence. That much of family violence is associated with the stress on men in a competitive, global economy is a major argument of this paper. Both forms of backlash, whether at the macro or micro level, are cultural in origin and derive from basic prejudice against girls and women, but especially against girls and women who are seen as competitive with men and therefore threatening. Resentment against the progress of affirmative action in western countries is matched by resistance to these democratic ideals in totalitarian nations. Women’s bid for equality has been used against girls and women in the United States, and poor and minority women in trouble with the law have paid for the male resentment against their more liberated sisters. Much of the backlash that we considered took the form of attempts to reverse feminist-inspired policies and activities.

Meanwhile, women from another part of the world have seemingly been punished for the advances made by women far away. Cultural clash often leads to violence as a means of holding girls and women down. Backlash, at its most basic level, is about power and control and fear of loss of that power and control. Backlash is also a response to anger and resentment by individual males whose place in society is undergoing rapid change, often faster than they can psychologically handle.

Redefining social science from a feminist perspective would focus not only on gendered inequities and on situations of “vengeful equity” but would also take heed of the impact of global dynamics. Women’s experiences, especially of exploitation and violence, effectively bring into sharp relief the underlying elements of globalization as a complex system of oppression.

The current backlash mentality is pervasive worldwide. Today we are living in a globalized economy characterized by rapid change and strenuous competition among nations, corporations, and workers. The stress on families and communities is severe; men whose “sense of their own manhood flowed out of their utility in a society” as Faludi (1999, p. 607) terms it, are often seen to be “fighting a world transformed by the women’s movement” (p. 413). Every social movement breeds a counter reaction, and as some individuals are losing their place in the world, even from forces that have nothing to do with the women’s increasing equality, some men are lashing out at the most vulnerable people in their lives—women. Psychologists call this *displaced aggression*. In the western world, two decades of the corporate media’s demonizing of girls and women has become as Chesney-Lind (2006) contends, a self-fulfilling prophecy as reflected in a masculinization of the treatment of women in the criminal justice system. Such attacks on girls and women are under the guise of equality. Another form of displaced aggression is seen in the privacy of the home in domestic violence. In some non-western nations, the form that the displaced aggression takes is a virtual war on women’s self-expression and their rights..

Human rights are women’s rights. This saying refers to women’s rights globally and has become a motto of the international movement for human rights. Attention is increasingly drawn to the 1948 United Nations International Declaration of Human Rights which included women as an at-risk population and which as in the U.S. Constitution states that no one shall be subjected to cruel; inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (United Nations 1948: Article 5). In 1995, Amnesty International took up the call

Such a global, human rights perspective provides for justification for demands of social justice by drawing on principles from a higher authority. Just as the demands of social justice are new, so we must think anew. And such new thinking is enhanced through the globalization of information through the new communications technologies.

The adoption of a human rights framework is increasingly relevant today, given the realities of the global market. A human rights discourse can provide a basis for awareness of, and alternatives to, the global regime that reinforces structures of disadvantage “through blatantly undemocratic processes which result in benefits for the few rather than the many” (Ife 2001:202). American feminist criminologists need to work toward ratification by the U.S. Senate of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. If the United States would join other nations in endorsing this treaty, it would provide a tool for women fighting for their lives across the world and provide protections under international law for women in the correctional system in the U.S. Feminist

criminologists from other Western nations can already draw on these protections as a valuable tool for advocacy for women's rights in their countries.

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