



***THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK  
But Finds Feminism Invincible***

***Alda Facio***  
San José, Costa Rica

**7<sup>th</sup> Annual Dame Nita Barrow Lecture**

**Toronto, November 2003**

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**Seventh Annual Dame Nita Barrow Lecture**

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## **THE DAME NITA BARROW DISTINGUISHED VISITORSHIP**

### **Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University Of Toronto**

The Dame Nita Barrow Distinguished Visitorship in Women in Development and Community Transformation was launched by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) in 1997. The Visitorship recognizes the remarkable contributions of Dame Nita Barrow, former Governor-General of Barbados and graduate of the University of Toronto.

The Distinguished Visitorship creates an opportunity for a woman from the “majority world” to be in residence at the University for six months each year working in the Centre for Women’s Studies in Education and the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology. Each visitor offers a course that calls on her particular area of interest and experience, dealing with the current issues of women in development, and community transformation in a global context and from a Southern perspective.

This is the text of the Dame Nita Barrow lecture  
presented by the  
Distinguished Dame Nita Barrow Visitor

**DAME NITA BARROW  
(1916-1995)**

*“Lost is a true daughter of the soil”  
- Erskine Sandiford, Former Prime Minister of Barbados*

The late Dame Nita Barrow, former Governor-General of Barbados, studied nursing at the University of Toronto from 1944 to 1948.

She served at various times as the world wide President of the Young Women’s Christian Association, the World President of the International Council for Adult Education, President of the World Council of Churches, and Barbados Ambassador to the United Nations. A member of the Global Fund for Women’s Board of Directors, Dame Nita was also a member of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Mission to South Africa in 1986 and the Convenor of the NGO Forum for Women at the United Nations World Congress on Women in Nairobi in 1985. In all these capacities Dame Nita championed the causes of justice, equality, peace, and the empowerment of women. With high government office, diplomacy, and statescraft, she linked grass roots initiatives and loyalties and was a tower of strength to local and world-wide movements inspired by her spirit of activism, compassion, brilliance, common sense and joy.

Dame Nita’s life was an outstanding example of dedication, commitment and selfless service to women, men and children, especially the poor, dispossessed and disadvantaged.

**Dame Nita Barrow Lecture**

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In the beginning of the so called 21<sup>st</sup> Century, on one of the least civilized planets of the universe, the economic, political, symbolic, social and military power was in the hands of a few sick men who suffered from such a severe misogyny that they had come to despise life itself. The illness had appeared some five or six thousand years earlier, when the male humans discovered that they had something to do with the reproduction of their species. Instead of jumping for joy at such a discovery, some became extremely resentful, hating all the years lost in veneration of the creative powers of the female. Their disease advanced to such an extent, that they hated and proceeded to declare war on anything and everything related to the feminine. This led them to invent a science of destruction and a necrophilic technology which nevertheless, permitted them to accumulate a great deal of power.

So great was their power, that by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a single Empire existed, formed by the group of States that previously were known as the developed countries, with a decentralized regulation apparatus, that progressively and openly incorporated global reality, expanding borders way beyond what their colonialist forefathers had imagined.

In order for some men to have the power to create and control such an enormous Empire, a system of domination accepted by most of the earthlings who inhabited that planet had to be in place. This universal system of domination was named Patriarchy by those women who saw it and understood it for the first time. At first, this form of domination was based on a family system in which fathers had absolute power over mothers and children of any sex. With time, the system became more subtle and intricate. By the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the mere fact of being defined as female or male at birth determined what would be the economic, social, ideological, symbolic or cultural value attributed to each new human and what roles he or she would be able to perform. The astonishing part was that the system was so sophisticated that for many centuries, the majority of earthlings believed that this was the natural order of things handed down by God himself.

But by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the system was not so easily identifiable. The discourse was now that women and men were equal even though hardly anything had really changed. Women continued to do most of the unpaid labor, continued to be victimized by violence and were

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\* This lecture is set in the future, and is given from the perspective of a history professor lecturing on patriarchy in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

still excluded from all but 1% of the wealth. But all women were not allotted the same value, nor was it prohibited for all women to perform certain functions. In fact, some women were powerful indeed.

Such was the sophistication of Patriarchy that extreme violence against women came to be understood, both by men and women, as eroticism. The colonizing of all women, known by certain scientists as “socialization,” made women “voluntarily” submit to the most painful and humiliating tortures: in some nations, the mothers broke the feet of their small daughters so that they would become objects of sexual pleasure for their future husbands—men who were not able to have erotic feelings towards women who were able to walk without pain.

In other nations, the colonization of the female humans had become so perfected that it was the women themselves who would place special instruments of torture on their own feet while insisting that it did not hurt them. These instruments, called “high-heeled shoes,” in time would deform their feet, their spine and their reproductive organs, but their “socialization” was so complete that even knowing the consequences to their health and their lives, the women of these nations continued using them because they knew that women who could walk with their feet well on the ground were not “feminine.”

In fact, such was the absurdity of many of these earthly traditions that in order for females to be feminine, they had to be molded into shapes thought up by the more powerful males of each culture. Thus in some cultures women were stripped of their sexual organs, while in others their breasts, hips, lips, eyes, legs or any other part of their bodies were enlarged or otherwise modified to fit the standards of beauty set by the patriarchs. Still in other traditions, women had to hide all but their eyes because their patriarchs had decided their physical self was disturbing to the men of their cultures. So it came to be that in all earthly cultures women’s physical appearance and well being was decided by the patriarchs or religion, tradition or fashion.

But the misogyny and violence went further. In all the cultures and in all the States, many women were raped by their own fathers, brothers, companions and friends. In all nations, they were mutilated, beaten, trafficked, forced into pregnancy and all kinds of sexual and domestic exploitation and in all nations it was believed that this was their fault and that they deserved or liked it. And even when some male earthlings accepted that violence against women was a human rights violation, the majority of humans continued to believe that this was a minor problem compared to the many other cruelties humans committed against each other. Or worse still, that due to the need to respect cultural diversity, this violence was not real violence, even though it was the product of the broader misogynist culture which was at the base of all earthly societies or communities.

The hatred and the violence against the mothers, the daughters, the sisters, the friends and colleagues of the men was so extended, and the complicity of many men with this system was such, that it was hard to see that this also affected the majority of men. Humans did not understand that a system that degrades precisely those who have the sacred power of giving life, was a system based on contempt for the process of creation and life itself. A system so

hostile to its female population could only degenerate into a system at war with nature. Thus, by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, humans had depleted the ozone, polluted their water and contaminated their crops with pesticides.

And yet, most humans did not see that such a system would inevitably become a system of exploitation of the many by a few, as it actually occurred: the Empire took advantage of a system already international, Patriarchy, in order to globalize its faith in the God of Free Market and declare war on all those who did not submit to it. Thus, the Empire had its roots firmly anchored in Patriarchy and would never be defeated without uprooting it.

As in all wars, there were forces that opposed this Empire. Among the opponents were some as misogynist as the Empire itself. Their objective was to destroy it in order to create states as cruel and dehumanizing as the Empire. Their energy also sprang from their hatred of women and everything associated with the feminine. But there were other, less misogynist groups that longed to recuperate and maintain their cultural and ethnic identity; or who were opposed to racism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, or any form of exploitation, slavery, genocide and torture; groups that fought for a healthy environment, for the respect of other beings and groups that prayed and marched for peace on earth.

Many of these groups used special tools that the earthlings called international treaties of human rights. On that planet, these Human Rights Instruments had been founded on the knowledge that in spite of their incredibly rich diversity, human beings shared a kindred spirit which made them realize that beneath the skin, they were all equal in dignity and worth. This drove them to maintain that human beings had rights and responsibilities towards each other based on the simple fact of being born human. It was further understood that this principle of universality meant that all human beings should be free from exploitation and injustice and it was the responsibility of each State and of the community of States to guarantee this.

In time, many human rights advocates came to understand that the welfare of the individual human was coterminous with the whole of society and that the welfare of both the individual human and society, depended on the welfare of the planet, including its rivers, mountains, cities and non-human dwellers. That is why by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century human rights were used to defend more than the individual. Collective rights and the rights of first nations as well as the rights of animals and of mother earth herself came into the picture. The Empire did not like this expansion of a theory it was using for its own purposes and therefore misinformed the many about its transformative potential.

Illogical and contradictory as it might seem to us, many humans of all genders, colors and classes, even those who were human rights advocates, did not think that eliminating discrimination against women and thus transforming the very basic structures on which the Empire based its power, was part of their battle against the Empire. They did not understand that their own sexism blinded them from seeing beyond the androcentric construction of their discourse and practice. And so, human rights theory became useless to more than half of the planet's humans.

In fact, many of the earthlings who took part in an anti-globalization movement which was formed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century were as sexist as the patriarchs of the Empire themselves. Certainly they did not advocate women's inferiority, but they made no effort to understand the connections between patriarchy and the Empire's globalization. This had been so ever since the birth of this movement, which sprang from other movements that had been created centuries before, when the absolute power of the Empire had not yet been established; when the powerful countries that formed the Empire were still in their imperialistic phase. These movements against dictatorial, colonial, authoritarian and racist regimes had all emerged sexist. And, although these movements were victorious in some parts of the world and were able to establish socialist or nationalist governments, they were not able to establish real democracies since they did not have the courage to eliminate their own male privileges. Thus, by not uprooting the most basic system of domination, they left a fertile ground in which other systems of exploitation of the many by the few would soon arise.

That is why a feminist reinterpretation of human rights theory became so crucial if the Empire was to be defeated. By the end of the eighth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a powerful international feminist human rights movement had been born which was successful in demonstrating that because sex discrimination affected half of the population of this planet, since earthlings conceived of only two sexes, eliminating it was indeed necessary if the principle of universality was to be upheld.

Taking advantage of the Empire's need to be seen as democratic, respectful of human rights and in favor of equality between the sexes, feminists were able to enter such sacredly male institutions as the military and the church. True, this later proved not to be such a great tactic as women could be as misogynist as the patriarchs, but it did demonstrate that women and men weren't so different after all.

But feminist human rights theory was not constructed or accepted from day one. More than three centuries of wars, deaths, genocides and destruction of the planet were suffered by earthlings before feminist principles became part of the collective imagination. Many men and women had to fight and die for their ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity. Later, when women realized that these principles did not apply to them, they had to struggle so that human rights would also include female humans. These battles and their triumphs were achieved in several stages as new understandings became available to humans.

The first concept that had to be accepted was that earthlings could have certain rights under international laws that had to be respected by each State. This was achieved when men, with the support of women, were able to establish some international treaties that guaranteed rights vis-à-vis the State. Once this was established, women were able to lobby in favor of other treaties explicitly concerning them. Nevertheless, these first women's treaties were still not considered human rights conventions and did not guarantee women equality, nor were they gender-sensitive, since these concepts would come much later.

Furthermore, the concept of international human rights had to be accepted. The horrors of a war known as the Second World War, and the need to protect individuals from such



horrors, led many States to agree on the need for an international system of protection of human rights. Thus, The Charter of the United Nations was created in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, both establishing that human rights were universal, interdependent and indivisible. These principles meant that all humans without distinctions as to race, sex, nationality, age, etc., had the right to enjoy and exercise all human rights and that each sovereign State had the obligation to respect, protect and fulfill them for all the inhabitants of each State.

Another concept that had to be accepted was women's capacity to have legal rights. This was not easy since the law itself had denied them this right for centuries. Throughout patriarchal history there had been many that had fought against the oppression of women in every culture and region, but it was not until the so-called Eighteenth Century that a women's rights movement emerged in what was later to become the dominant culture of the Empire. Little by little this movement put the notion of women's legal rights in the minds of the more progressive male humans. Two prominent women among the very many unknown activists were Mary Wollstonecraft, who published her famous *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, in 1779 and, Olympe de Gouges, who wrote, in 1791, *The Declaration of Women's Rights*, based on the principles found in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. Some decades later, Elizabeth Cady-Stanton and Lucretia Mott, retook and modified the Declaration of Independence of the country that would later become the most powerful oppressor, and wrote another early proclamation on the rights of women, known as the Declaration of Seneca Falls, written in 1848.<sup>1</sup>

Once the fact that women could have legal rights was established, the idea that men and women could have equal rights had to be accepted. This did not mean that they had to have exactly the same rights, but that women had the same right to have all the rights needed in order to live a dignified life. It was therefore understood that men and women were not identical and that women did not have to be like men to enjoy all human rights. On the contrary, it was understood that human rights had to be fulfilled in such a way that the different needs and experiences of men and women would be considered. It was further understood that women did not have to be identical to each other in order to be equal under human rights law. The most important treaty regarding this concept came into force in the Eighties of the Twentieth Century, known as the Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women or the CEDAW Convention. By the end of that century, this treaty had become the second most ratified international instrument. Hence, women's human rights was truly a planetary concept although, of course, not in the minds of all.

Later, feminism, a theory that explained the power structures that kept women subordinated and oppressed, had to develop methodologies that would place the lives of women at the center of human rights theory and erase the artificial distinction between the private and public spheres. The feminist methodologies and theories developed worldwide during the Seventies and Eighties of the so-called Twentieth Century proved that gender not only

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, many women that lived before Mary and Olympe spoke out and fought against the subordination and exploitation of women, but what they spoke out and what they fought for specifically on women "rights" is not known.

referred to the ways in which roles, attitudes, values and relations with regard to children, women and men were constructed in earthling societies; but that gender also structured social institutions, such as the law, religion, the family, the market, as well as the concept of beauty, kindness, sanity, etc. Through these methodologies, it became evident that gender created distinct social positions for an uneven assignment of rights and responsibilities between the sexes. The development of feminist perspectives helped to make visible the power relations among women and men and, therefore, the incredible discrimination and violence suffered by women in all spheres throughout the entire world.

Finally, the androcentric bias in the theory and practice of international human rights had to be unveiled. This did not happen until the Eighties of the Twentieth Century, when a few feminist thinkers began their critique of the human rights paradigm, demonstrating that the “human” in human rights theory was not representative of all humans. He was a heterosexual, middle to upper class white male, a father, a property owner, with no visible disabilities, and most probably a Christian or, if not, of the dominant Muslim, Hindu or any other of the main Earth Religions. These women proposed a more inclusive gender-sensitive formula that would include women and men of all colors, ages, sexualities, abilities, regions, spiritualities and cultures.

However, by the end of the first year of the Twenty-First Century, feminists were losing their faith and their strength. The Empire had penetrated the feminist discourse to such an extent, that it had lost its identity. It became impossible to know when a feminist or an agent of the Empire was speaking. Both feminists and non-feminists spoke of the need to have more women in decision-making political positions, of penalizing domestic violence and “putting an end to impunity” and even, of the innumerable improvements in the life of women achieved because of globalization. In their eagerness to speak the language accepted in the age of globalization, feminist discourse and practice had lost a great deal of its transformational potential. In fact, many feminists had forgotten that the whole idea of feminism was not to have a bigger slice of the pie, but to change the recipe.

It must be recognized that the Empire was very sophisticated in its strategies to maintain itself in power and even to increase it. One strategy was the very old but always successful one of “divide and conquer.” For example, the Empire encouraged large world conferences where participation by all the representatives of the distinct forms of exploitation and discrimination was welcomed but that ended in a wearisome battle for meager bits of power. Boycotting the union of all the oppressed people against it, the Empire was able to replace the language of unity with a discourse on diversity that hid the common causes of their oppression. Though feminists had insisted that women’s sense of themselves could only be built on the recognition of their diversity, this particular tactic of the Empire undermined women’s potential for female solidarity through women identifying as women because it fell on ears that were trained to fear and distrust women. Even in the gender studies programs that were instituted all over the world by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, many feminist scholars maintained that there were no commonalities among women. Some went as far as to say that the very notion of “woman” was obsolete.

But the most efficient strategy used by the Empire during these times was to use the power of naming so as to confuse its enemies. In this way, it called “globalization” not only the greedy advance of the most fierce form of capitalism, but also the free exchange of ideas, cultures and strategies of the exploited and discriminated. Thus, even in the minds of the many who were suffering its policies, globalization came to be understood as something good that should be welcomed by all.

The Empire was also successful in making those who dared to question the goodness of globalization appear as uncool reactionaries whose clocks had stopped. In the new millennium, its very good publicity said, globalization is the answer to poverty and underdevelopment. Especially after the defeat of the USSR—an imperialist center that was opposed to the proto Empire regarding its economic tactics, but shared its contempt of the feminine—and since 1994, the year in which the powerful of the world economy gathered in Bretton Woods in order to set the new rules of the who-can-get-richer game, an army of businessmen repeated insistently the wonders of living in a world regulated by the omniscient wisdom of the Free Market.

Nevertheless, just a few years after the new world order was established with the tools of globalization, the economy of the Empire began to break down. In the United States, the most powerful locus of the Empire, one fourth of the children lived in poverty; in Europe, another important locus of the Empire, fifteen million persons were unemployed. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, stock markets plunged further and further down, causing numerous and abundant losses, affecting, at first, only small investors who had fallen into debt in order to acquire stock. Later on, the plunge affected more and more large trans or multinationals that began to carryout massive layoffs. In other words, things were not so rosy in the Empire.

As history has shown, just when empires begin to feel omnipotent, large protests of people opposing them rise up everywhere. So it was in the Empire. In spite of its complete control of the mass media, many earthlings began to see the difference between neo-liberal globalization and a global movement to improve the lives of the inhabitants of that planet. This became a great danger for the Empire. If people became aware of its strategy, it could lose its power. And the Empire began to worry.

But, on September 11<sup>th</sup> of the year 2001, some men, obedient to the same misogynist forces of the Empire, but with different strategies and objectives, offered the Empire the perfect excuse to legitimize its intention of imposing its economical, political, cultural and social power, not only through its strategy of neo-liberal globalization, but with the use of its military might.

In spite of the fact that he and his predecessors had always used the same tactics, the supreme ruler of the Empire labeled as “terrorists” not only the murderous actions of “fanatic groups,” but also the innocent inhabitants of all nations whose leaders provided shelter to an alleged terrorist. Following this logic, the Congress of the United States passed a law that would punish any State that declared itself neutral towards its new Holy War. The Empire decided that the time of pretending to be democratic and respectful of human

rights was over. It argued that faced with the threat of terrorism, every restriction of rights and liberties to the inhabitants of the periphery was justified.

In a position questioned by many of its own, it even went as far as deciding that even a restriction to some rights of the citizens of the Empire was also justified. And, in order to gain support from the female half of this Great Nation, the Empire gave one of its wars against a famine-struck nation, a touch of indignation at the treatment that the leaders gave to their women.

So it came to pass that feminists after September 11<sup>th</sup> were faced with a new and old situation at the same time. Old because patriarchs had always used women to justify their wars. Old because in spite of some progress for some women, the gender structures which maintained women oppressed had been kept almost intact. New, because September 11<sup>th</sup> marked in the history of this planet, the unequivocal militarization of the process of globalization of extreme capitalism.

With regards to the old problems, feminists continued to follow a strategy of dialogue with each State, to get them to fulfill their human rights. But given the escalation of the Empire's war against humanity, feminists realized that this was not effective. Most States no longer had much power, nor were capable of solving any problem. So, feminists continued to work within the State whenever this was worthwhile, but channeled most of their energies into creating a strong movement. With an Empire willing to remove its democratic mask and impose its power with the use of military force, feminists could only stop the negative impact of globalization with the creation of a counterculture and a new reality that would bring hope to humanity.

To create this new reality, feminist had to stop believing that if they wanted to have any influence on the power structures of the Empire and its transnational corporations, women needed to be pragmatic, realistic and tailor their discourse to what the political leaders and CEO's could or would accept. Feminists needed to see that by speaking the language accepted by the Empire, they were not able to give voice to women's needs or interests. They remembered what they had discovered many times, that feminism was not about getting for women what men already had. That it was not about making proposals that could fit neatly into the patriarchal mode. Neither was it about prestige and fame for feminist scholars, or intellectual property or who is the most discriminated, or the most brilliant or even about who has the truth. Feminism was about women valuing and seeking the power that lies in friendship and solidarity in an environment that encouraged women to distrust or even hate each other. Feminism was about women joining together to continue the struggle against imperialism by opposing globalization.

If feminists could succeed at consolidating a strong international feminist movement, firmly rooted at the local level, women were in the best position to unite all the groups against globalization and ultimately defeat the Empire. After all, women belonged to all walks of life, sectors of society, all races, classes, ages, abilities, sexualities, etc. and if they could unite, they would be invincible.

To create this new way of being in reality, feminists had to convince all those opposing the Empire's strategy of globalization, that the caring and nurturing of human beings had to be at the center of all utopias. Feminists had to be able to get everyone to understand that globalization was a phenomenon that replaced an economy based on production of goods, for one based on speculation—and that this had been possible thanks to an earlier system that valued production of goods over the reproduction of people. In other words, feminists had to make the other groups that fought against the Empire see that contempt for life was the energy that fueled the process of globalization. Feminists needed to convince everyone that the only way to counter imperial capitalism's over-valuation of virtual goods was for everyone to incorporate into their discourse and their utopias, the complete range of issues relating to the caring and nurturing of life, including eroticism and pleasure. Without this, they were doomed.

Feminists, conscious of the fact that structural adjustment policies imposed through the Empire's strategy of globalization, had brought a greater impoverishment of women, were in an ideal position to understand that in the globalized world, women and men were living in societies that despised the daily acts of caring and nurturing and had no respect for those who produced food, clothes, houses, etc. Incredible as it may seem, most did not see that a system which devalued the activities around the preparing of food, could easily degenerate into a system that devalued its production. Most did not understand that a system that devalues those who do the cleaning and keeping of the homes could very well degenerate into a system that devalued those who did the constructing and fixing of them. Thus it came to pass that in the Empire, not only what was considered women's work was undervalued but also that of carpenters, farmers, builders and all craftspeople. In the Empire, only the accumulation of money and power was considered successful. And still, most earthlings believed that those who had enormous wealth were not the real thieves, because they did the thieving through Trade Agreements signed by the leaders who had not been chosen to lead. And it came to pass that by the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the wealth of a few very powerful men, meant the poverty of billions, 70% of which were females.

Globalization, by overvaluing the intangible and the virtual, had managed to replace action with discourse. This complicated things because the majority of women were not feminist nor did they see through the Empire's tactics. Many women were convinced that mainstreaming gender into the institutions of the Empire would bring about "equity." Even the major architects of the Empire's globalization tactics, such as the World Bank or the IMF, were able to implement their structural adjustment plans without much opposition from the women in power because, "they were doing it with a gender perspective." In an evaluation made five years after one of the largest world conferences, known as the Beijing Conference, the women of the world were found to be poorer, suffer more violence and be more marginalized from the real power centers than ever. And yet, at that same evaluation meeting, many insisted that women had advanced because they were present in the discourse of the powerful; and a gender perspective had been incorporated in most policies and projects.

Globalization was destroying hope, because by trapping millions in poverty, recourse to violence became a means of survival to many. Most people could no longer expect the

situation to improve, thus, their only exit was to steal, to traffic, to kill. And as the most marginalized had no access to the rich, they stole, trafficked and killed their sisters and brothers, companions and neighbors. A central issue of feminism had been the right to live without violence, but, without hope it became nearly impossible to ask anybody to believe in non-violence, because the silencing of hope itself is violence. That is why feminists were in an ideal position to call upon all the groups to make out of non-violence, a right to hope.

Globalization, with its tactics of neoliberal adjustment, privatizations and labor flexibilization, was eliminating both urban and rural small and medium-sized productive units, creating more and more countries stripped of their sovereignty for lack of their own development projects. Feminists had long known that equality between men and women, difficult to achieve even in the Empire, was absolutely impossible in an unjust and impoverished economy. But they also knew that nations that kept their women poor and illiterate were also doomed. That is why feminists were able to make the links between the commercial inequalities between poor and rich countries and the social inequalities between men and women. They knew that in order to eliminate the former, the latter had also to be eradicated.

Redefining democracy, fundamental liberties and human rights in general, had been a good strategy of feminism in the decades before September 11<sup>th</sup>. However, the militarization of globalization had poisoned these concepts, which capitalism itself valued, to such an extent, that this redefinition seemed meaningless to many. Democracy had become a system where people could elect among two or three corrupt or incompetent candidates and this only if they pleased the Empire. Equality had come to be understood as sameness with the dominant males of the Empire and so the choice for everyone was between being an oppressor or being oppressed. Again feminists had a strategy which proved that these were not real choices, nor the only ones. For centuries many feminists had insisted that equality was not about sameness or democracy about elections, and they were able to help others see through the Empire's strategy of maligning human rights by imposing a very limited understanding of them. Feminists knew that equality for women was about recognizing differences while upholding the possibility of solidarity among all women. Feminists, even while struggling for the right to vote, had insisted that Democracy was a political system based on respect for the totality of human rights for everyone, not on mere formalities or ritual elections. Because of their long history of struggling for these rights, feminists had given richer meanings to them.

Before the consolidation of the Empire, many feminists had supported the unrestricted freedom of expression, thinking that thus they would be able to express their own ideas and images. But the Empire was clever. It transformed freedom of expression, into freedom of trade for enormous corporations that were able to alter the truth to their own interests. Still worse, these globalized businesses, became experts in presenting the ways citizens of the Empire lived, looked and felt as the aspiration of all humanity. All the inhabitants of the planet wanted to be dressed, eat, dance, sing and feel as did the inhabitants of the Empire's TV Land. And again, feminists had already discovered that the media's treatment of truth, fell on the fertile grounds of patriarchal misogyny. They saw the connection between the contempt for real women in the fabricated images of the female in the media and the

contempt for nature as a whole because neither could be packaged and sold. And selling, not informing, was their business.

Globalization had permitted the country with the largest market of intangible products and a military system to support it, to be seen as the leader in questions that had nothing to do with military and economic power. Thus, the educational, legal, and political system of the Empire were models to emulate, in spite of the fact that in the most powerful country of the Empire, the last president had not been chosen by the majority of the voters; prisons were full of ethnic minorities; most women did not enjoy basic human rights, and generally, higher education was not producing greater thinkers, but better technocrats. In a world less and less critical of what emanated from that center of arrogance and despotism, few questioned why the Empire's science, medicine, technology had not brought even the inhabitants of the Empire, more leisure, liberty or health.

So it came to pass that feminists began to lose their fear of being labeled essentialists or inefficient idealists. They allowed themselves once more to be rebels, transgressors and subversives. More importantly, they became dreamers and builders of other realities. They began to create other ways of feeling in their bodies, other forms of relating to divinity, other aesthetics and other ethics. At the same time they joined others in a more egalitarian future, carrying their own luggage and enriching the ideas and practices of the indigenous, youth, farmers', workers', consumers', landless, homeless, disabled people's, and gay and lesbian movements. They joined the struggle against racial, ethnic and class discrimination and exploitation. They learned to listen to the wisdom of many non-dominant cultures and they began to listen to themselves with love and compassion never forgetting that it was in the Empire's interest that women compete and destroy each other. They stopped believing that just because the experience of implementing communism had proved so despotic and dehumanizing, capitalism was the only viable model, or that the Empire was invincible. They saw the need to feminize all progressive ideologies with their dreams and ideals. Otherwise these would fail again and things would get much harder for women.

Obviously, for the consolidation of an alliance, feminists had to make a great effort to forgive their progressive brothers for their historically repeated betrayal of women. Using their raised consciousness to go inward, feminists were able to deal with the possibility of future betrayals by making contact with their own spirituality instead of feeding their pain. On this journey inward they awoke to the fear the betrayal had provoked in them and acknowledged it with a new found respect. In doing so, feminists were able to see how the anger that sprang from this betrayal impeded most women from enjoying the road towards equality and justice. Thus they came to understand that their love for life and all its creatures urged them to forgive while staying in touch with their anger and pain. They decided to heal the injury by dropping guilt and manipulation. In their stead, they awoke to the fierceness of the wild mother, the boldness of the young enchantress, the wisdom of the old crone and the tantric power of the three combined. This is how they rediscovered that there was more happiness in forgiving, more energy in love, more possibilities of success in tenderness.

This new way of seeing and understanding feminists' relationships with progressive men did not stop them from knowing that a new betrayal was possible. After so many revolutions in which they had fought shoulder to shoulder with them, the "new men" had proven to be quite old: they wanted power only for themselves, decorated themselves with elegant, slender, young women and decided not to be dirtied with domestic work. So, a new strategy had to be found. And it was. Feminists decided to use the human rights instruments, especially the CEDAW convention, this time to raise the consciousness of their progressive brothers.

And thus, with the maternal patience they had used in training and convincing the officials of the State, corporations and other international institutions on the importance of the incorporation of a feminist human rights framework, they began channeling their energy towards their progressive brothers. It was time to convince them that without feminist analysis and strategies, there was no possibility of sustained triumph over this or any other Empire. It was important that these men understand the subtleties of the patriarchal system of domination and how it was the basis of the one imposed by the Empire. Men and women needed to see that globalization, being the model of capitalist domination on an international scale that the Empire had imposed, could only be defeated by a planetary movement with feminist ideals.

That is why feminists spoke of the need for all groups to embrace a feminist world view based on compassion and love for all things living instead of the Empire's fascination with death and destruction. If the Empire was to be defeated, the widespread distrust and hatred of the feminine needed to be flushed out of the hearts and minds of earthlings. This implied interpretations of reality different to the globalized one, which at its core, was patriarchal. It implied the re-elaboration of values, reformulations in language and symbols, science, art, in the movies and music and literature, in sports as in every other activity based on feminist principles. It required a re-discovering of humanity and a re-inventing of the self in the midst of a war the Empire called pre-emptive. The Empire was striking back, said its propaganda, but everyone knew it was striking out.

And that was how the adventures of the new feminists began. Women and men willing to stop the Empire, not with its necrophilic arms of death and destruction, but with the instruments arising out of the ability to take pleasure in and revere life; the critical analysis of reality; a willingness to embrace a spirituality based on love; a commitment to abandon the fear-based worldview that purported to have answers to everything; and a profound desire to enjoy another possible world. Those who have read about these adventures know that the first steps were taken when most feminists began to laugh at their own mistakes and imperfections and did it so often and so hard that the Empire trembled.



## **BIOGRAPHY**

**ALDA FACIO** is a jurist, writer and international expert on women's human rights, violence against women and feminist analysis of the law.

In September 1996, Alda was awarded the first Women's Human Rights Award from International Women, Law and Development in Washington D.C.

As one of the founders of the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice in the International Criminal Court (ICC), she was its first Director from July 1997 to September 1999.

Since 1990, she has been the Director of the Women, Gender and Justice Program at the United Nations Latin American Institute for Crime Prevention (ILANUD) based in Costa Rica. The Program focuses its work around the elimination of gender inequality and violence against women from a criminal and human rights perspective. It does legal, social and political analysis and research; and trains judges, parliamentarians, police, lawyers and women. Alda has written widely on these issues and was one of the first women in Latin America to denounce the androcentric bias in Human Rights law and practices. For 14 years she was a correspondent for FEMPRESS, a Latin American Feminist Magazine.