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## Symposium Foreword: Applying Feminism Globally

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## FOREWORD: APPLYING FEMINISM GLOBALLY

Margaret E. Johnson<sup>†</sup>

Welcome to the *University of Baltimore Law Review's* first issue dedicated entirely to articles from the Center on Applied Feminism's Feminist Legal Theory Conference. It is with great enthusiasm for this new collaboration and the Conference itself that I write this foreword to the issue.

The Center on Applied Feminism serves as a bridge between feminist legal theory and the law. Unique within the legal academy, the Center seeks to apply feminist insights to legal practice and the policy arena. In particular, the Center examines how feminist theory can benefit legal practitioners in representing clients, shape legal doctrine, and play a role in policy debates and implementation. On March 30–31, 2011, the Center sponsored the Fourth Annual Feminist Legal Theory Conference: *Applying Feminism Globally*. The Conference brought together academics, practitioners, and activists from around the world to discuss such topics as Global Perspectives on Women's Bodies, Health, and Reproduction; Women, Work and Socioeconomic Rights in the Global Economy; Women in Combat and Conflict – and Consequences; and Feminist Activism Around the World.

Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison was the keynote speaker for the Conference. During her address, she pondered the meaning of the conference's theme: Would applying feminism globally mean that the conference was advocating for an exporting of United States values and political theory to other countries and people? Upon her review of the abstracts from the conference, she found the answer to be a strong "No!" Instead, the Conference explored how feminist legal theory operates in a global and international context. The Conference raised a variety of questions: How has feminist legal theory affected

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<sup>†</sup> Associate Professor and Co-Director, Center on Applied Feminism. I want to thank former Dean Phillip Closius for his long-standing support of the Center on Applied Feminism's Feminist Legal Theory Conference and the *University of Baltimore Law Review* for dedicating an annual issue to publish papers from the Conference. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the work of my Co-Directors, Professors Michele Gilman and Leigh Goodmark, as well as Shannon Wrenn, the Center Associates, Laurie Terbeek, and Lexi Milani, without whom the Conference would not be a success.

the lives of women across the globe? How does feminist legal theory differ across cultures within and outside the United States? How could feminist legal theory from outside of the United States benefit American women and feminist scholarship? How do post-colonial perspectives on feminist legal theory apply in a domestic context? Can feminist legal theory improve our understanding of challenges facing immigrants within our own borders? How are human rights norms compatible with feminist legal theory? As such, the Conference explored transnational feminism. In doing so, the conference examined the meaning of feminism in different cultures and contexts and how or whether feminism has evolved and changed in its varying contexts.

In this issue, we have articles across the theme of Applying Feminism Globally. In *Feminism in the Global Political Economy: Contradiction and Consensus in Cuba*, Professor Deborah Weissman examines how the Cuban feminist movement is both uniquely national and globally-influenced. As a result, the Cuban feminist movement mediates its loyalty to the Cuban national and revolutionary history while employing global strategies. This strategy has both helped and harmed the Cuban feminist movement. For example, Weissman argues that the Cuban feminists successfully employed the global domestic violence movement to promote its Cuban anti-domestic violence movement without drawing negative world attention to Cuba's specific domestic violence epidemic. At the same time, Weissman discusses how the Cuban feminist movement has suffered from the global world economic crises because Cuban women are bearing the heaviest burden of these crises.

In *CEDAW and Rural Development: Empowering Women with Law from the Top Down, Activism from the Bottom Up*, Marta Vanegas and Professor Lisa Pruitt explore the unique focus CEDAW has on rural women regarding the right to organize self-help groups and cooperatives and the right to infrastructure including sanitation, electricity, housing and water. Specifically, Vanegas and Pruitt argue that these rights express feminist legal theories such as the necessity of women's economic empowerment to change structural inequities and the focus on empowerment circles and other collectives to achieve equality. The authors argue that the top-down approach of the law's endorsement of economic and political rights of women and the bottom-up approach of the women's collectives in effectuating such economic and political change work together to empower rural women.

In *Cross-Dressers with Benefits: Female Combat Soldiers in the United States and Israel*, Professor Pamela Laufer-Ukeles examines the differing status of women in the military in the United States and Israel. She then analyzes how the different statuses affect women's actual equality in these two countries. As Laufer-Ukeles explains, despite the United States' limitations on women's participation in the military, the United States is actually more progressive than Israel in its treatment of women in the military. Although Israel has neutral laws permitting either gender to serve, the many loopholes and mandatory exemptions for women to avoid service have limited the advancement of Israeli women soldiers, making them less equal than their counterparts in the United States. Accordingly, Laufer-Ukeles ultimately concludes that facially neutral or discriminatory laws do not alone answer the question of whether or not there is discrimination. Rather, she argues, the context in which the laws operate, such as the society's view and actions towards women's equality, is critically important as well.

And finally, in *The Modern HIV/AIDS Epidemic and Human Rights in the United States: A Lens into Lingering Gender, Race, and Health Disparities and Cutting Edge Approaches to Justice*, Brook Kelly argues for an intersectional analysis of human rights in order to address the U.S. HIV/AIDS public health crisis that disproportionately affects poor women of color. Specifically, Kelly argues for a two-step approach using multidimensional means such as fact-finding, community organizing and education, media, and legislative advocacy. First, Kelly argues for a critical race, gender and class analysis of the laws that maintain the structures that perpetuate the high rates of HIV among poor women of color in the United States. Second, Kelly argues that new progressive policies—specifically looking at human rights norms and positive rights—should be constructed that account for and disassemble structural inequalities involving race, gender, and class. To do so, Kelly urges the use of such multidisciplinary approaches as documentation and review and legal advocacy.

As is hopefully apparent from the above discussion, this issue provides an enlightening view of the diversity in which feminism is being applied globally. Confirming the view of Toni Morrison, the articles show an anti-essentialist view of global women, their issues, and transnational feminism. We hope you enjoy the articles in this issue and will join us for future Feminist Legal Theory Conferences.

