

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

RE-ORIENTING WESTERN FEMINISMS

The agenda of contemporary western feminism focuses strongly on women's equal participation in work and education, reproductive rights and sexual freedom. But what does feminism mean to the women of rural India who work long hours in someone else's fields, young Thai girls working in the sex industry in Bangkok servicing Japanese, American and Australian men, or Filipino girls working as maids for wealthy women in Hong Kong? Chilla Bulbeck presents a bold challenge to the hegemony of white, western feminism in this incisive and wide-ranging exploration of the lived experiences of 'women of colour'.

Bulbeck examines debates on human rights, family relationships, sexuality and notions of the individual and community to show how their meanings and significance in different parts of the world contest the issues which preoccupy contemporary Anglophone feminists. She then turns the focus back on Anglo culture to illustrate how the theories and politics of western feminism are viewed by non-western women.

Chilla Bulbeck is Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Adelaide, and was previously at the Faculty of Humanities at Griffith University. She is the author of *One World Women's Movement* (1988), *An Introduction to the Social Sciences* (1993, 2nd edn 1997), *Australian Women in Papua New Guinea* (Cambridge, 1992) and *Living Feminism* (Cambridge, 1997). She has written for *Women's Studies International Forum* and *Australian Feminist Studies*. She taught Australian studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University in 1991 and 1993, and was director of the Australian Institute for Women's Research and Policy in 1992–94.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



*Europe supported by Africa and North America.
Ascribed to William Blake.*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a
Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

RE-ORIENTING WESTERN FEMINISMS

WOMEN'S DIVERSITY IN A POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

CHILLA BULBECK



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521580304

© Chilla Bulbeck 1998

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1998

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Bulbeck, Chilla, 1951– .

Re-orienting western feminism: women's diversity in a postcolonial world/Chilla Bulbeck.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-58030-7 (hardback). – ISBN 0-521-58975-4 (pbk.)

1. Feminism. 2. Feminism – Developing countries. 3. Women – Social conditions. 4. Women – Developing countries – Social conditions.

5. Minority women – Social conditions. 6. Pluralism (Social Sciences). I. Title.

HQ1154.B848 1998

305.42–dc21

97–25836

ISBN 978-0-521-58030-4 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-58975-8 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate. Information regarding prices, travel timetables, and other factual information given in this work is correct at the time of first printing but Cambridge University Press does not guarantee the accuracy of such information thereafter.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a
Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For Alison, Rebecca, Madelaine and David

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Rather than imagining that women automatically have something identifiable in common, why not say, humbly and practically, my first obligation in understanding solidarity is to learn her mother-tongue. You will see immediately what the differences are. You will also feel the solidarity every day as you make the attempt to learn the language in which the other woman learnt to recognize reality at her mother's knee. This is preparation for the intimacy of cultural translation.

– Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 1992:189–90

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	x
Abbreviations	xi
Introduction	1
Justifying the Divide	1
The Changing Name Brands of Feminisms	7
Radical, Liberal and Socialist Feminism	7
The Critique from Women of Colour	9
Sameness–Difference Feminism	10
Gynocentric and Postmodern Feminisms	12
Postcolonial Critiques of Western Feminism	14
Outline of the Book	16
1 Fracturing Binarisms: First and Third Worlds	18
Histories of Colonialism	19
Declension Narratives	19
Southeast Asia: sex-role complementarity?	21
Case Studies: India, China, Japan	23
Modernisation and Tradition: Histories of the Veil	29
Classifying Women's Worlds: First, Second, Third?	34
Empirical indicators: 'more than 100 million women are missing'	39
Fracturing Binarisms: Postcolonial Desire	44
Orientalism	46
Hybridisation	52
Conclusion	54
2 Individual versus Community	57
Constructing and Deconstructing the Western Individual	58
Speaking the 'Self'	60
The Ties That Bind	63
Human Rights or Western Rights?	69
Universal Declarations of Human Rights	70
Refracting Rights Through Needs	74

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

• Contents

Agency and 'Customary Practices'	79
Infibulation	80
Sati	88
Conclusion	93
3 Mothers and Wives	97
Mothers, Wives and Sisters	97
Reproductive Labour and its Products	99
Population Policies	101
To Have and to Hold: Reproductive Choices	110
The Powers of Mothers	112
The Double-edged Significance of 'Black Matriarch'	114
Sisters in Struggle	117
Brideprice, Dowry and Patrilocality	120
Brideprice, Dowry and Domestic Violence	121
Patrilocality and Mothers-in-Law	123
Conclusion	127
4 Sexual Identities: Western Imperialism?	129
'Core' Sexual Identities in the West	131
Sexual Confessions: Christianity and Foucault	131
Sexual Expression: Freud and the Sexologists	133
Masculinities and the Monstrous Feminine	134
Pollution or Pornography?	136
Mother–Son Bonds	141
Speaking With Two Lips to Recognise Third Genders	147
Homosexual Acts and Homosexual Lives	148
Third Genders	154
Sexual Identities Invade the Interior of Colonised Subjects?	160
Little Honeys in China: Prostitutes or Concubines?	160
Women's Magazines in Singapore and India	162
Conclusion: Post-sex	165
5 The International Traffic in Women	167
International Connections Between Women	167
The International Decade for Women	169
Trade: Freedom Through Labour?	173
Unpaid Unseen Women's Labour	174
Women's Paid Labour: the Free-Trade Zones	176
Prostitution and Sex Tourism	180
Aid: International Bounty?	186

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents •

The Doubled Vision of Migrant and Indigenous Women	188
Refugees	188
Eating Her Words: Multiculturalism	191
Women's Studies and Women's Politics	196
Women's Studies	196
Women's Movements Around the World: New Practices for Old Battles	199
Conclusion	204
Conclusion: Braiding at the Borderlands	206
Speaking and Subject Positions	208
Seeing 'Our' 'Selves' Through the Eyes of 'Others'	211
Coalition Politics	216
Endnotes	222
Bibliography	226
Index	266

Table

Life expectancy, maternal mortality and infant mortality rates:
the poorest performing nations 41

Maps

Images of the world from the Middle Ages to the twentieth
century 36

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first debt is to Professor Hester Eisenstein who introduced me to ways of looking beyond Anglo feminisms when she was a consultant at Griffith University in 1986. My colleagues at Beijing Foreign Studies University provided the congenial environment in which the seeds of this book took first form. In particular, I would like to thank Professors Hu Wenzhong, Wu Zhenfu and Yu Zhiyuan. Professor Wang Jiexiang provided valuable insights on feminism in China, including a response to a draft of this book. My female students in the Australian studies classes of 1991 and 1993 discussed gender relations in China with me, both inside and outside the classroom. I remember in particular conversations with Li Wenhong, Ni Weihong and Zhu Xiaodong. Besides supplying a translation for a number of Hindi words in the book, Peter Mayer kindly read an earlier draft and suggested I seek feedback from 'outsiders' to white middle-class English-speaking feminism. This was invaluable advice, leading to the very substantial and useful comments from Doctors Parlo Singh and Indrani Ganguly. Royalties from the sale of this book go to the International Women's Development Agency to contribute, if only marginally, to the improvement of the status of some of the women who appear in the following pages.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58030-4 - Re-orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World

Chilla Bulbeck

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ATO	Alternative Trading Organisation
CAA	Community Aid Abroad
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NESB	non-English-speaking background
NGO	non-government organisation
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association of India
UN	United Nations
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WICH	Women in Industry, Contraception and Health
WID	Women in Development
WLUML	Women Living under Muslim Laws