[Angela Davis, painted portrait in Lyon, France. Image by Thierry Ehrmann.]

Angela Davis, writing on US women's prisons--where poor women, women of color, queer, and transgender people are disproportionately harassed, abused, and raped behind closed doors—asks, what if we named US women's prisons as "secret" prisons, prisons that operate within the same political context and rely on similar forms of violence as the CIA's secret prisons of the war on terror? Davis is referring to the CIA's secret prisons in places like Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Morocco where suspected "enemy combatants" are tortured, sexually assaulted and raped. Individuals are tortured by US personnel at detention facilities directed by the CIA or by foreign agents within jails assisted by the CIA.

While teaching courses in US Women of Color Feminisms and American Studies on the one hand and Middle East Women's Studies on the other, I have run up against the limitations of area-studies divisions that continue to predominate within Middle East Women's Studies—such as the framing of American Studies (including US Women of Color and Native American Feminist Studies) and Middle East Studies (including Middle East Women's Studies) as separate fields and the United States and the Middle East as geographically bounded regions. Such divisions obstruct the possibilities for engagement with

important questions such as whether and to what extent racist/classist/heterosexist US prison structures have anything to do with the US war on terror. In fact, a particular strand of feminist scholarship that I will refer to here as Anti-Imperialist Transnational Feminist Studies (AITFS) has been asking such questions for decades, and these questions are now more imperative to Middle East Women's Studies than ever before.

Anti-Imperialist Transnational Feminist Studies theorizes the US war on terror as a racialized, gendered, and sexualized imperialist war that operates through military and economic policy in order to advance and consolidate the system of capitalism. AITFS contextualizes the US war on terror within the restructuring of US domestic *and* foreign policy, which entailed an expansion of the conjoined heteropatriarchal, racist, and classist structures of the prison industrial complex (PIC) and the military industrial complex (MIC), both driven by the economic neo-liberalism of the late twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Historically, the Reagan era's neo-liberal economic policies and the war on drugs during the decades leading up to the war on terror set this process into motion. Notably, throughout this period, the MIC has worked through a neo-liberal system in which functions of the military were increasingly transferred to bodies outside of the state, including private corporations, subcontractors, and universities. Paralleling this process, the US prison industrial complex has also undergone privatization so that nearly all prison-related service providers are for-profit companies and are sustained by a racist, classist, and heteropatriarchal criminal justice system.

Taking the lead from AITFS, I would like to focus on parallel conversations taking place within U.S. Women of Color Feminist Studies and Middle East Women's Studies about US-led imperialism in the two decades leading up to, and the period immediately following, the official start of the US war on terror in 2001. While these conversations (and these scholarly disciplines) often emerge separately, I take interest in the points of convergence that I believe are crucial to conceptualizing gender, sexuality and US-led imperial war.

US Women of Color Feminisms on the Expansion of Prisons and Criminalization Post 9/11

A bit of background: It is no secret that the United States has the highest documented incarceration rate in the world—at least one in one hundred people in the United States are behind bars—and that the prison system is highly racist, sexist, and homophobic (African Americans comprise approximately 13.6 of the U.S. population, they comprised 39.4 percent of the prison population in 2009 and as of 2008; Native women are 40 percent of the total female prison population in Montana; one in ten prisoners face sexual assault; and LGBTQ people face exceptionally high rise of sexual abuse). In 2009, in the state of Michigan, where I live, a class-action lawsuit brought to public attention the cases of over five hundred women who experienced sexual assault by prison guards. Between the late 1980s and 2001, the rate of

women's incarceration increased fivefold. Over the last two decades, and particularly since 9 September 2001, the United States has witnessed an intensification of law enforcement and an expansion of the prison industrial complex.

U.S.-based Women of Color Feminisms have established that the increased reliance on criminalization as a solution to problems such as gender violence, poverty, youth rebellion has disproportionately impacted women of color, native women, poor women, queers and transgender people, sex workers, immigrant women, women with disabilities, and other marginalized women and increasingly brings them into more and more poverty and direct conflict with the law. Consider for instance mandatory arrest laws, which were passed in response to feminist criticism of police officers who refused to intervene in cases of domestic violence. Mandatory arrest laws were one part of a larger strategy to criminalize domestic violence; yet these laws have led also to the criminalization of women who are trying to escape from or survive violence. In some cases, police officers called to domestic incidents place the woman who is being battered under arrest. Increased cooperation between branches of law enforcement facilitates the deportation of undocumented women who report that they are abused. Initiatives designed to "get tough on crime" have led to long and punitive sentences for women convicted of acts of violence, even when committed in self-defense against their abusers. Most insidious of all, when resources are expended on policing and prisons while social programs such as women`s shelters, welfare, and public housing face budget cuts, increased violence against women is the inevitable side effect. These cutbacks leave women with fewer options for leaving violent relationships.

Transnational Convergences

We might ask how US Women of Color Feminisms would look if scholars engaged more deeply with the transnational anti-imperialist strands of Middle East Women's Studies, including the well established research on the gendered and sexualized discourses that fuel US empire building--such as the call to "save Afghan women" or US and Zionist narratives about saving Arab and Muslim queers from a homophobic culture and religion.[1] Middle East Women's Studies has also thoroughly documented the gendered implications of US-led imperial war and U.S.-backed Israeli settler colonialism.[2] Alternately, studies of the Abu-Ghraib torture scandal, including the theorization that the United States *exported* its long-standing, historically embedded colonial discourses of male supremacy, homophobia, and white supremacy, have indeed drawn on U.S. Women of Color Feminist and Native American Feminist scholarship. As Scott Morgensen has illustrated, conversations between Middle East Gender and Sexuality Studies and Native American Gender and Sexuality Studies can enhanced respective analyses of Zionist pinkwashing, (U.S.-imperial) homonationalism, and white-supremacist settler colonialism and open up possibilities for "imagining and practicing the interlinked work of decolonization."

Such conversations can also contribute to deeper analyses of both U.S. law enforcement and the US military since local US law enforcement is increasingly using US military technology, and law enforcement and the military are increasingly sharing equipment and strategies. We might ask for instance, what are the implications of the Pentagon's recent report about sexual assault in the US military on gender violence in the United States and in the countries the US military is invading? According to the Pentagon, an estimated average of seventy sexual assaults are committed daily within the US military or twenty-six thousand per year (a thirty-seven percent increase in one year). Such conversations can also deepen feminist understandings of torture since personnel and methods of torture and degradation are shared between US prisons and the military and can further our concepts of "war culture"--since war culture permeates US law enforcement and schools, hospitals, and civil society.

In response to current conditions in the United States where police, who are armed with war weapons, shoot and kill unarmed women, men, and children of color, where police can remotely administer shock to detainees, and where drone manufacturers may offer police remote-control drones, organizations such as INCITE! Women of Color against Violence are using the terms "law enforcement violence" to refer to a convergence of policy brutality and the brutality by border control, private security, and military forces within the United States. US Women of Color Feminisms have also analyzed the impact of the gendered economic structures of US imperial war, focusing on how budget cuts in the United States have brought about a massive loss in financial aid to women, children, and families in desperate need of housing, heating, and healthcare, as well as contributing to unemployment and wage stagnation, all of which culminate in fewer opportunities for women to have safer, stronger, and healthier lives. Middle East Women's Studies analyses of US-led imperial war similarly contribute to US Women of Color Feminist Studies, with theorizations of the gendered-economics of the war on terror (in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and so on).

Researching and teaching beyond one-directional feminist analyses that focus on *either* the extreme devastation resulting from US imperialism and war in the MENA region *or* racial-classist-heteropatriarchal violence in the United States means taking seriously how US "domestic" politics and US "foreign" politics exist within a similar historical and political frame. The points whereby the U.S. "domestic" and "foreign" conjoin--and are made and re-made through one another—are also crucial axes for alliance building and accountability across disciplines and borders. Yet while framing the domestic and foreign structures of U.S. imperialism as relational and mutually constitutive, I also want to avoid assuming shared experiences, or that people hailed into US imperialism (and its racial and heteropatriarchal foundations) from varying locations share *equal* struggles. Rather, we might ask how the histories of people from different political locations within the US and the MENA region (and beyond) rub up against each other when they are hailed into similar imperialist structures—in different ways and to different degrees.[3] For instance, how do we approach alliance building and the asymmetry in the

balance of powers when it comes to U.S. military recruitment of working class US women of color (who will face high risks of sexual assault) through false promises about employment and education *and* US-led bombing, killing, and sexual assault of women living in Muslim majority countries and their communities? Working beyond nation-based concepts of temporality and spatiality, transnational anti-imperialist feminism brings to the center the diverse tempos and reverberations of imperial war, acknowledging the very silences and exclusions fundamental to imperial nationalisms and area studies approaches. While I have centralized US Feminisms of Color and Middle East Women's Studies, we might continue the questionsTransnational anti-Imperialist Feminists have been asking in relation to other areas of inquiry and struggle, such as how the lives of the tens of thousands of third country nationals from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and beyond--who are coerced into cheap labor and devastating conditions by corporations such as Halliburton in Baghdad—converge with those of Iraqi women living under the same war.

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[1] Amireh, Amal. "Palestinian Women's Disappearing Act: The Suicide Bomber Through Western Feminist Eyes." *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging*. Ed. Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, & Nadine Naber. Syracuse University Press, 2010. 29 – 45.

[2] Johnson, Penny, and Eileen Kuttab. "Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada." *Feminist Review* 69.1 (2001): 21–43; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. "How Do We Read Violence Against Palestinian Women in Israel?" *Jadal* 6 (2010): 1–4;

[3] This point comes out of a dialogue with Sarita See and Allan Isaac.