Home, Memory, and Beyond

Amy Shimshon-Santo

This brief theoretical review presents ideas and strategies central to feminist planning in order to reinvigorate feminist projects at the intersections of difference and place. Four themes are discussed including: 1) publicizing women's roles and concerns within planning and policy; 2) revisiting critiques of home; 3) reviewing challenges for socializing women's history; and 4) rethinking the connection between consciousness and agency. I argue

that transnational feminist debates remain at the periphery of planning, although better attention to this emerging scholarship could expand the production of planning knowledge and improve strategies for social action to better the lives of women, as well as men and children.

Publi(city)

Theoretical discourses about women's participation have often been hashed out in discussions of the public and private spheres, including the position of women and the household in the reproduction and production of the economy, the state, and community. Whereas androcentric theories viewed the household, and women, as outside the public realm of politics and the economy, many feminist accounts asserted that the public realm is an invention of bourgeois society. What in fact are the boundaries of the public? One might ask: aren't households often regulated and controlled by the state? Feminist criticism of the welfare state would answer this question affirmatively (Prügl 1999). Doesn't the household have broad economic significance? Feminist studies have argued that the household reproduces labor power fueling capitalist economies, and that many women labor at home through informal survival strategies (Lowe and Lloyd 1999). The boundaries of the public are in fact contested, or, as Rosalyn Deutsche (1998) suggests, a social construct rather than a scientific category. As a result, one can argue that mapping a public sphere simultaneously invents whatever is left outside of that space. Publicizing issues seen as private and/or marginalized is one way to bring silenced women's issues into the realm of public debate and planning intervention.

However, can a generalized location, or women's place, be assumed for all women? Critiques of essentialized notions of gender suggest that although it is good to publicize women's issues, one cannot assume a universal position—or spatial location—for all women or men (Spivak 1994). Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) points out that the dominant conceptualization of "public" and "private" spheres is specifically complicated by race and class. But the line between stories that are publicized, or told, and stories that are silenced is constantly being contested and negotiated. For example, Rosa Linda Fregoso's (1999) article "Re-imaging Chicana Identities in the Public Sphere" finds that Chicanas have redrawn the imagined boundaries between public and private life through alternative cultural productions.

A closer look at housework, for example, elucidates just how inexact the spatial boundaries are between an imagined private or public economic life. Domestic workers leave their homes to labor in other households, effectively confusing the conceptualization of women's space as private since domestics often work for other women as wage workers in private spaces (Hill-Collins 1990). Rather than seeing domestics as removed from public life, Hill-Collins sees domestics as having a *broader* awareness of both private and public social spaces that privileged women tend not to see or know. The notion of women's space as private tends to inspire a vision of women's place as only recently proletarianized. In fact, working-class women, including many

racialized adults and children, have labored in the public realm for centuries without enjoying many basic "public" rights (such as voting and access to adequate education and health care for themselves and their families).

Women's participation in the "informal" economy is another example of how women are made invisible in economic policy and planning. Allison Freeman, Francine Pickup, and Lamia Rashid (1997) explain that women do productive work in and outside the home, yet policymakers consistently overlook the functioning of the informal sector in their interventions. These authors demand a new definition of work that includes formal and informal paid labor as well as dependency work. Although the notion of a split between public and private spheres makes little sense in terms of understanding the informal economy and post-Fordist flexible production, perhaps extending public rights to informal and underpaid labor is a more valid focus for publicizing the private economy.

Deutsche suggests that redefining the term "public" to avoid distorted conceptualizations and language is an important step towards constructing a politics of cultural space that does not relegate certain groups to the status of outsider, or other. "Rather than a real category," she explains, "the definition of the public, like the definition of the city, is an ideological artifact, a contested and fragmented terrain" (1998: 59). The argument that women's empowerment depends in part on positioning ourselves more favorably within the public sphere is common knowledge, but is complicated by understanding differences among women. The simple notion of women at home and men in the workplace is not an accurate historical depiction either of working-class women's social location, or of women's role in flexible production schemes in a globalized economy.

Although many people have critiqued the notion of a private/public split, the assumption that women entering the official "public sphere" of work is somehow emancipatory is perplexingly resilient (Lowe and Lloyd 1999; Hill-Collins 1990; Deutsche 1998). A case in point is the Clinton Administration's violent reforms of the welfare system. These reforms were cloaked in the language of "moving people from welfare to work." This underscores a locational shift from home (seen as a place of rest, although not so for many women!) to "empowerment" through paid labor. What ensued was the misrepresentation of poor single mothers as free riders, and misdirected blame for their inability to obtain a livable wage. This reform visualized "work" as something that happens *outside* the home. *Moving* poor women out of the house into the public realm of "work" (i.e., paid labor) was defended by welfare reformers as increasing women's independence. This would benefit the state by decreasing the national debt, and women by fostering their independence.

However, policies like "welfare to work" have not adequately addressed the broader issues affecting this vocational—and locational—transition for women. How can poor women making unlivable wages sustain a family? Who will provide flexible work schedules to allow more parent/child contact? Who will care for the children left at home when mothers are

out working? Who will support mothers trying to gain an education in order to expand their life opportunities as they sustain their children inside and outside the home? Who will calm the stress brought on by a double workday consisting of unpaid work at home and poorly paid work outside the home? Who will transport the children to school and doctor when mother is working? Who will involve other adult partners in the home to help share household and financial responsibilities? How might public and private institutions such as schools, neighborhood organizations, public health providers, and the media best support poor households—whether they be headed by one or two adults, male or female, gay or straight? A better approach to welfare planning and policy would have asked these and other questions important to different women, and included clear mechanisms to address these concerns. After all, the well-being of mothers is linked to the well-being of households, and the health of broader communities.[1]

Iris Marion Young (1998) asks for a reconceptualization of the importance of dependency work by recognizing that one cannot assume an ideal of independence as embodied in a paid job. There are people who cannot achieve that standard of independence, such as children and the elderly. Those who care for these dependent people provide an important social service. Young suggests a new standard for autonomy where dependency workers (such as mothers) are guaranteed subsistence, and depicted as helping society rather than being free riders. Valorizing women's public service is one important arena for publicizing and understanding the role of the household in the social, political, and economic life of communities.

Home

Elisabeth Prügl, a feminist scholar in international relations, makes the important point that "although public-private distinctions constructed women as outside of politics, gender relations were never purely domestic" (1999: 3). This section addresses the metaphoric representations of gender through the built environment—specifically in the idealized "woman's space" called home. Perhaps no metaphor better demonstrates how the imagined and the material, the cultural and the spatial, are intertwined than the notion of the American Dream as embodied in a single-family home.

Iris Marion Young critiques the notion of the American Dream as sustained in a private dwelling when she recalls, "the dream of a house in the suburbs became my mother's nightmare" (1997: 144). Young's discussion of the inability of her mother to meet the standard for housewives in her neighborhood—despite what her daughter considered good parenting skills—dramatizes how maintaining the dream house requires rigid standards of conduct by parents and children. Standards for cleanliness and hygiene accompanied the invention of a home as a space of capitalist consumption. This standard asserts itself at the most intimate level—the disciplining of the body itself. This notion is so prevalent that even I could not help keep my jaw from dropping open when my mother-in-law once counseled

me with the words of an old cliché: "You keep your man by what you do in the kitchen and in the bed." For Young, women's place is not only seen as in the home, but women are seen as *being* a home to the men and children in her household by the attention she provides them.

Daphne Spain argues that the home functions as a metaphor exposing the social relations residing both within, and beyond, its walls. "Spatial and social relations mutually reinforce one another, and if status differences are engendered within the home, they are likely to be expressed outside it also" (1992: 111). Emphasizing housework as unrecognized, unvalorized, and either free or underpaid leads many feminist accounts to reject motherhood and marriage as inherently oppressive for all women. Young writes:

> Many cultures historically and today equate women with home, expecting women to serve men at home and sometimes preventing them from leaving the house. If house and home mean the confinement of women for the sake of nourishing male projects, then feminists have good reason to reject home as a value…Women serve, nurture, and maintain so that the bodies and souls of men and children gain confidence and expansive subjectivity to make their own world. This homey role deprives women of support for their own identity and projects. (1997: 134)

Martin Heidegger asserts that the dwelling symbolizes a human way of being composed of two qualities: building and preservation. However, privileging building over preservation is androcentric, and assumes that women have no architectural history—effectively erasing all women who design, plan, or

build. Heidegger sees the preservation of home embodied in women's work as inward and nostalgic, in contrast to the outward focus of building as reflective of male identity. Young posits that woman is "assigned to be place without occupying place. Through her, place would be set up for man's use but not hers" (1997: 139).

However, I find more compelling the arguments claiming that there can be no universal interpretation of the meaning of home for all women since women are not a homogeneous group (Hill-Collins 1990; McDowell 1999). For example, not all women labor in their own homes; many labor in other women's homes. Many people have found their lives torn apart by forced labor, expulsion, exile, or travel in search of a paid job, and many have encountered themselves in the position of raising the children of others in exchange for wages while their own children live at a distance. Young argues that the social relevance of caring for those incapable of independence suggests the validity of financial support for dependency workers.

Another realm of feminist critique has been the myth of home as a place of harmony and safety. But home can arguably be seen as a location of violence against women just as much as it can also be a haven from the violence of public life. Many women have struggled to build a home as a space for cultural and economic survival—an activity that has been impeded by institutionalized racism such as restrictive covenants, the former illegality of inter-racial marriage, and the present illegality of same-sex marriage. Consider the recent passage of Proposition 22 by

California voters to deny public marriage rights to lesbian and gay couples, or the demonization of female-headed households in recent political discourse about welfare programs and poverty. These cases suggest that redefining the household and making space for alternative family formations is an important realm of struggle. What does this mean for feminist critiques of home? Clearly, the significance of home for women is differentiated and ambiguous.

Young concludes that there are qualities of home that reflect powerful feelings and social relationships.

> Despite the oppressions and privileges the idea historically carries, the idea of home also carries critical liberating potential because it expresses uniquely human values. (1997:134)

Lucy Lippard sees the pursuit of a "home place" as the search for a center, "for some place to stand, for something to hang on to" (1998: 27). The discussions about home demonstrate the institutional limitations on women over their *supposed* location of power—the home. The privatization of space and institutionalization of private ownership of property have made home a privilege, while the pursuit of a home space ought to be a human right. People without places to live are given their own social category: homeless. A myriad of social, economic, political, cultural, emotional, and environmental factors have formed and transformed the very structure of family life and the organization of human dwellings. Given the diverse meanings of home for different women in different contexts, how might one organize programs, policies, or research to favorably impact women's home lives? De-essentializing feminist discourse is an appropriate beginning place to move beyond one standard for all households and families. Nuanced connotations of home expose how different women turn to the home as a source of power, while others flee from it to expand their choices, yet others want to approach home life in alternative constructs that redefine the traditional nuclear family.

Memory

Much of feminist planning practice has focused on recalling or reconstructing lost histories through historic preservation and/or public art efforts. Why has so much emphasis been placed on resurrecting women's place in the past? One motivation is to claim women's presence; carve a place; garner visibility. Many feminist public art strategies in the US set out to reconstruct and re-insert silenced urban histories into public view. Although Franz Fanon (1994) and Leopold Senghor (1994) suggest that an important realm of de-colonization practice is to reconstruct misrepresented histories, they also see limits to a purely historical focus. Young finds reconstructive histories for oppressed groups as problematic. She claims that a focus on history, memory, and nostalgia does not easily lend itself to the idea of space as "supporting the individual subjectivity of the person, where the subject is understood as fluid, partial, shifting, and in relations of reciprocal support with others" (Young 1997: 141).

I argue that the recognition of historical erasure and misrepresentation of women and people of color in the official memory of places requires a rebuttal in some form of cultural reconstruction and valorization. However, as Paul Gilroy (1993) suggests, one must be aware of the problems with imagined traditional authenticity. Addressing the context of black liberation movements, he suggests that overemphasizing historical reconstruction often suggests the idea of reclaiming a lost *pure* cultural authenticity, whereas in fact, there is no cultural purity for anyone to *return* to. Gilroy also claims that a critique of nostalgia and authenticity is particularly pertinent to gender:

> These crises are most intensely lived in the area of gender relations where the symbolic reconstruction of community is projected onto an image of the ideal heterosexual couple. The patriarchal family is the preferred institution capable of reproducing the traditional roles, cultures, and sensibilities that can solve this state of affairs. (1993: 194)

History, suggests Gilroy, ought to link historical reconstruction with contemporary struggles against inequality. Identity struggles are best seen as related to political and economic struggles, and stories from the past ought to be tied to the making of history in the present.

Does restoring women's history to the public realm through public art address these dilemmas? Dolores Hayden's Power of Place Project sought to sustain the memory of Biddy Mason, an African American founding foremother of the city, through a public art project. The delightful monument in Los Angeles honoring Biddy Mason's life communicates far more to the public about Mason's ingenuity and leadership than a mere plaque, or the once popular "man-on-a-horse" monument common in many older public spaces.

However, I was taken by the monument's physical location on an unassuming and almost hidden path, facing a parking structure in downtown Los Angeles. While the Power of Place Project successfully avoids romanticizing the past, or over-emphasizing masculinity over femininity, other spatial problems still demand attention. First, both the material and cultural landscapes of downtown LA have changed so dramatically that Mason's monument seems almost *out of place* as she claims her own place—her former homestead. The environment surrounding the monument almost overwhelms her claim to that grounded memory. But maybe that was the point of the monument: to juxtapose the past with the present to dramatize how cities change over time.

Maybe the momentary rupture of meaning at the encounter between what came before and what is now is the liminal moment created by the historical monument. However, given the dramatic changes in urban LA, one might question whether the monument might have better informed contemporary African American historical education if it were located in a *less* authentic place (i.e., not necessarily her homestead). Might Mason's memory have been better recycled if the monument had been located somewhere like the First A.M.E Church, where it could be linked to ongoing community educational efforts?

Although I don't think that there is one correct answer to locating a monument to women's history, I mention this dilemma to illustrate a point. How can one approach intervention in historicizing place in the built environment when people (the location of communities) are constantly shifting? In the context of global cities like LA this problem requires greater attention. This dilemma challenges planners to think about historic preservation not as resurrecting the ruins but as linking historical memory to the invention of history today.

Idea / Action

Feminism can be seen as both a social movement for women's emancipation, and a subject of social inquiry (Lowe and Lloyd 1999; McDowell 1999). This basic assertion is fundamental to any interpretation of feminist planning. Most importantly, it sets a standard for social research that informs social action, and action that is informed by critical thinking. In this section I argue that the question of how to organize for women's emancipation begins with a notion of membership and location. In addition, I discuss critiques of the link between consciousness and agency.

Oftentimes the location of action, or women's mobilization, has been visualized as one universal women's movement. However, much feminist research has discussed the need to differentiate women's mobilization given the specific contexts of women's lives. Divergent feminism(s) have critiqued racism or class privilege within the women's movement, and projected new ways of approaching feminist social mobilization (Perez 1999). Women have often chosen to organize within and around different social movements from identity politics to immigrant and/or labor rights. Emerging research in transnational feminism has documented the diversity of social movements that are linked to issues of gender, race, and class (Lowe and Lloyd 1999; Kaplan, Alarcon and Minaloo 1999).[2] Audre Lorde suggests that seeing identity as complex and multilayered helps to understand the linkages between different axes of power regimented through representations of gender, race, sexuality, age, and class. In addition to critiquing social research and action that overlooks diversity within the group called "woman", Lorde suggests that valuing difference can open new opportunities for alliances between different groups around shared issues (see Young 1998). Norma Alarcon argues that post-structural decentering of subjects, and ethnic women's critiques of the essential woman, have been crucial to reconceptualize and improve women's social mobilization efforts.

I would like to posit that understanding multiple identities and memberships can inform better strategies to address a broader range of issues related to gender, race, class, sexuality, and nation. The notion of multiplicity encourages analysis and action that move beyond the idea of pure authentic identities, and embraces more flexible notions of culture and membership. This suggests that planning show more seriousness in analyzing and responding to sexism, racism, and classism. This challenges planners to think and act in a more multi-vocal way. There is not room to prioritize one axis of power

over another since race, class, nationality, sexuality, and belief all intersect.

A second dilemma arising from the notion of feminism as social inquiry and social mobilization is the relationship between thought and action—a key problem in the field of urban planning. Gayatri Spivak (1993) argues that a major contradiction within Marxist and Feminist theory is the idea that consciousness will organically result in meaningful agency. However, one might ask if a powerful idea always suggests an appropriate action? Certainly planners are aware that ideas and plans with the best of intentions do not always result in positive outcomes. On a more positive note, feminism's dual responsibility of judging good scientific inquiry not only by the knowledge it produces alone, but on its practical relevance, is a fabulous standard for academia. Although McDowell (1999) is ambiguous about this, I believe that challenging essentialism in feminist planning, or in the women's movement, does not necessarily dissolve a place to organize around women's many concerns. In fact, Gayatri Spivak argues that complicating the understanding of women's lives is necessary for better social projects. She writes:

> It is not that deconstruction cannot found a politics, while other ways of thinking can. It is that deconstruction can make founded political programs more useful by making their in-built problems more visible. To act therefore is not to ignore deconstruction, but to actively transgress it without giving it up (1993:121).

Sandra Harding argues that feminism implies a new approach to social research. She states:

> If one begins inquiry with what appears problematic from the perspective of women's experiences one is lead to design research for women…The goal of such inquiry is to provide for women explanations of social phenomena that they want and need, rather than providing for welfare departments, manufacturers, advertisers, psychiatrists, the medical establishment, or the judicial system answers to questions they have. The questions about women that men have wanted answered have all too often arisen from desires to pacify, control, exploit, or manipulate women. Traditional social research has been for men (1987: 8).

When applied to planning, Harding's argument notes that women enter the realm of planning from the outside, from the margin. Since, for the most part, planning history in the US has been erected by privileged Anglo men, a concern for the intersections of gender, race, and class within planning represents a broader aperture, a more inclusive beginning. However, feminism has needed to problematize the intersections between gender, race, class, nation, and place. While Harding's comments correctly historicize the chasm between the production of social science and women's lives, she uniformly locates women *outside* of various institutions that oppress or neglect other women. This universal position of women *outside* is questionable. Spivak (1993) tries to go beyond essentializing women's place by shedding the term woman for *subaltern* to address gender, class, and race at the local level with attention to global relations. Given the context of globalization, she find the term

subaltern preferable since it is free from the limitations of the national imaginary, and the tendency to see feminism as focusing only on white middle-class women's issues.

Can greater numbers of "subaltern" women and men involved in planning from different class, ethnic, or national backgrounds organically restructure planning theory and practice? I believe that broader participation and questioning will positively impact planning inquiry and practice. However, "new" participants ought to value what everyone brings to planning (i.e., the questions and ideas important to our experiences) or assimilation can result in lost opportunities for planning for multiple publics. By assimilation, I refer to people who strive for inclusion without transformation. Spivak suggests that identity is complex and hybrid, and that local power structures are formed through both local and global relationships. Harding's assertion posits that being feminist requires asking questions important to women and applying one's research to tangible action. In simple terms, the challenge of constructing an non-biased society requires the informed critical participation of multiple groups with multiple perspectives.

Concluding Thoughts

I began this paper by critiquing simplistic notions of a public and private sphere as it relates to different women's lives. However, despite problems with conceptualizing economic activity as a public or private construct, struggles to expand the rights and opportunities for multiple publics, and to appropriately

valorize dependency work in relation to other aspects of the economy, remain important issues for many women and children. Contradictory thoughts about home as simultaneously a woman's "nightmare", and a more loving place, suggest that there is no universally correct analysis of the meaning of home for all women. Any understanding of the significance of home requires opening space for alternative family formations, and appropriately militating for financial support for dependency workers. Reconstructing distorted, or silenced, histories through public art or historic preservation will better address the current crises of women who suffer from poverty, racism, and sexism by moving beyond a conception of spatial inequalities as the simple repair of a symbolic identity crisis. A more powerful approach to women's history would link historical preservation with the invention of new histories by linking the past to contemporary struggles for social justice through ongoing educational and outreach efforts, and critical analysis of space which accounts for demographic changes in place in the context of globalization. As an expression of social movement(s), and a realm of social inquiry, feminist planning ought to set a higher standard for academic research that is useful for social action to better women's lives, yet embraces critical thinking to expand and improve its grounding knowledge.

In conclusion, I turn to the work of Brazilian geographer Milton Santos who touches on the specific challenges for the organic intellectual in way that I find appealing. Santos suggests that one way to subvert the reproduction of racist and sexist practices is

to expand participation of people excluded by what he terms "bodily" characteristics (i.e., racialized and gendered bodies). However, he also suggests that in addition to inclusion, critical thinking is crucial. Santos argues that:

> the moment that an intellectual serves the establishment he/she is no longer an intellectual. An intellectual's job is to be critical (1998).

I end this discussion with Santos' potent thoughts and the suggestion that one's ability to remain critical can open spaces for expanding consciousness and agency. This includes the questions that planners ask and attempt to explain, and the actions people enact to transform their realities.

Endnotes

[1] Policy reform might have begun by historicizing the relationship of women to the state, as Prügl (1999) and others have done. She argues that the welfare state has played the gendered role of "protector" to women as "protectees."

[2] See Lowe and Lloyd (1999) and Kaplan, Alarcon and Minaloo (1999). In addition, Hill-Collins' *Black Feminist Theory* (1990) suggests different ideas and approaches to black women's mobilization. Shirley Hune (Cole 1998) notes that despite differences among Asian Pacific Island Women, Asian Women in the United States suffer from the same stereotypes imposed by dominant culture.

References

Cole, Johnetta B. 1998. Commonalities and Differences. In *Women in Culture*. Edited by Lucinda Joy Peach. Oxford: Blackwell.

Deutsche, Rosalyn. 1998. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Fanon, Franz. 1994. On National Culture. In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, A Reader*. Edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press.

Freeman, Allison, Francine Pickup, and Lamia Rashid. 1997. Women's Income Generating Activities in the Informal Sector. In *A City for All: Valuing Difference and Working with Diversity*. Edited by Jo Beall. London: Zed Books.

Fregoso, Rosa Linda. 1999. Re-Imagining Chicana Urban Identities in the Public Sphere, Cool Chuca Style. In *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*. Edited by Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Harding, Sandra. 1987. Is there a Feminist Method? In *Feminism and Methodology*. Edited by Sandra Harding. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Hill-Collins, Patricia. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge.

Kaplan, Caren, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem, (eds). 1999. *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Lippard, Lucy. 1998. The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multi-centered Society. New York: The New Press.

Lowe, Lisa and David Lloyd (eds). 1999. *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

McDowell, Linda. 1999. *Gender, Identity, Place*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press

Prügl, Elisabeth. 1999. *The Global Construction of Gender*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Santos, Milton. 1998. TVCULTURA. Interview on Globalization, São Paulo.

Senghor, Leopold Sédar. 1994. Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century. In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, A Reader*. Edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press.

Spain, Daphne. 1992. *Gendered Spaces*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1993. *Outside in the Teaching Machine.* London: Routledge.

Young, Iris Marion. 1997. *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

AMY SHIMSHON-SANTO is a doctoral student in Urban Planning at UCLA. Her emphasis is on cultural planning and the role of art as a form of survival and resistance.