Chapter 6

From Third Wave to Third Generation: Feminism, Faith, and Human Rights

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In recent decades, feminists of faith have been central voices in international human rights discussions. This was particularly the case at the UN-sponsored 1994 International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing, which focused on core feminist issues of reproductive rights and gender equality. The struggle for women’s rights has rarely, however, been disconnected from broader struggles for human rights in the areas of poverty, peace, health, environmental sustainability, cultural rights, and rights to development and self-determination of peoples that have come to be known as the “third generation” of human rights. The hallmark of third generation rights, in contrast with first generation civil and political rights and second generation social, economic, and cultural rights, is that they involve big global problems that no state or region of the world can solve alone. For this reason, third generation rights are often referred to as rights of “fraternity” or “solidarity.”1 Third generation rights have become particularly important with the advent of globalization, with its exposure of the ways in which we are a connected and mutually interdependent world.

The increased attention to these third generation rights coincides, in important ways, with the emergence of third-wave feminism.2 In much the same way that third generation rights expanded the reach of first and second generation rights, third-wave feminism embraces first- and second-wave feminist concerns in areas of sexuality, gender, reproduction, and family that have been traditional feminist issues, while at the same time calling for engagement with global feminist communities and global feminist issues, which embrace many third generation rights concerns. The expansive global sensibility of third-wave feminism is illustrative not only of the way in which “women’s rights are human rights” (Clinton 1995), but also of the inseparability of women’s human rights from broader third generation human rights.

1 The “third generation human rights” term is attributed to the Czech-French jurist and former UNESCO head, Karel Vasak (Vasak 1979a).

2 The term “third-wave feminism” was coined by third-wave feminist Rebecca Walker (Walker 1992).
Both third generation rights and third-wave feminism have been contested on various grounds. Some human rights scholars see the first and second generation rights as perfectly adequate and view third generation rights as unnecessary—perhaps not even human rights at all (Sehmer 2007, Algan 2004, Alston 1982). Likewise, the notion of a third wave of feminism has sometimes been a source of tension between second-wave feminists who see their struggles as not yet concluded, and third-wave feminists who want to move on to new issues (Walker 1992, Siegel and Baumgardner 2007, Henry 2004, Pollitt 2010). The equality-difference paradigm has been an important rubric of analysis in feminist legal theory and feminist philosophy, balancing the quest for sex equality with acknowledgment of the biological, and even moral, differences that shape women’s experience (Bartlett and Rhode 2010, Bock and James 1992, Gatens 1991, Bartlett and Kennedy 1991). But third-wave feminists have expanded the equality-difference paradigm beyond sexual and reproductive arrangements, to include questions of global justice and equity.

In this chapter I will describe how third-wave feminism corresponds to third generation human rights in ways that advance both feminism and human rights in the normative, humanitarian, and pluralistic direction that is necessary for our twenty-first century, globalized, and cosmopolitan world. I will then provide an analysis of the ways in which recent international women’s human rights conferences have sought to elaborate women’s third generation rights. I will then suggest some ways in which third-wave feminist and third generation rights themes were anticipated in the lives and work of a group of twentieth- and twenty-first century women, who have drawn on faith in seeking legal and social change. The group includes Dorothy Day, Wangari Maathai, Rigoberta Menchú, and Aung San Suu Kyi. For these women, both feminism and faith have been important resources in connecting women’s rights to broader human rights in a way that mirrors third-wave feminism’s insistence on diversity and pluralism of voices and issues. I will conclude by identifying a set of additional themes that link third-wave feminism and third generation rights through the lives of these women who were, in key respects, third-wave feminists before their time: a concern for diversity and pluralism, looking beyond sexuality and reproduction, attention to

3 Some of the intergenerational angst is also reflected in pithy quotes that have emerged between second- and third-wave feminists (Henry 2004). In her analysis of these tensions, social critic Katha Pollitt reports that, in response to the notion that third-wave feminists can carry the torch for second-wave feminists, leading second-wave feminist Robin Morgan has quipped, “Get your own damned torch. I’m still using mine.” (Pollitt 2010). Referring to the characterization of third-wave feminism as post-feminism, a popular bumper sticker/lapel button slogan, apparently reflecting second-wave sentiments reads, “I’ll be a post-feminist in the post-patriarchy.” By contrast, leading third-wave feminist Rebecca Walker has proclaimed, “I am not a post-feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave.” (Walker 1992). In the last analysis, both second- and third-wave feminists claim their feminism—however differently construed.
the material and cultural dimensions of rights, a caution against perfectionism, and, in theological terms, a shift from creation to redemption.

Third-Wave Feminists and Third Generation Rights

Analysis of third-wave feminist writings reveals both new conceptions of feminism and new conceptions of rights. The editors of one influential third-wave feminist reader, Rory Dickerson and Alison Piepmeier, argue that their generation demands a “politicized, activist feminism that is grounded in the material realities and the cultural productions of life in the twenty-first century” (2003: 5). They call for a third-wave feminism “dedicated to a radical, transformative political vision, a feminism that does not shy away from hard work but recognizes that changing the world is a difficult and necessary task, a feminism that utilizes the new technologies of the Internet, the playful world of fashion, and the more clear-cut activism of protest marches, a feminism that can engage with issues as diverse as women’s sweatshop labor in global factories and violence against women expressed in popular music” (2003: 2). Third-wave feminism advocates for material rights in a neoliberal political economy in ways that correspond to third-wave anti-poverty and development rights. Their use of technology, fashion, and popular culture tends to raise eyebrows in second-wave feminist circles (Valenti 2007, Levy 2005, Fillion 1996), but in the context of globalization these are increasingly places

4 A definitional note on third-wave feminism may also be in order, particularly as the movement now seems to overlap and include two separate groups. The first group, reflected in the anthologies cited above, is largely composed of women from Generation X, which came of age just as women’s studies and other feminist programs were being established in the academy and elsewhere. These early third wavers came of age during the Clinton Administration, which, but for the Lewinsky scandal at its end, was notably supportive of women’s human rights, particularly in the international realm. The second group, reflected in the numerous blog postings cited below, has benefitted from women’s studies and feminist education and the technological and communicative revolution of the Internet, but it also came of age during the Bush Administration, which arguably achieved some goods for women in Afghanistan, its HIV programs in Africa, and its strong record against sex-trafficking, but was also notably hostile to international organizations and much of the human rights community, including many women’s rights organizations, particularly the UNFPA, from which it withheld funds repeatedly.

5 In this material emphasis, third-wave feminism conjures up themes from earlier socialist feminisms. The writings of Heidi Hartmann in the 1970s and 1980s are, perhaps, the best known examples of second-wave socialist feminism (Hartmann 1979, Sargent 1981). Socialist feminism, particularly its more Marxist and radical versions, tended to die out with the general discrediting of socialist feminism at the end of the Cold War. In light of recent global events since the 2008 recession, it might be time for a rereading. One contemporary legatee of earlier socialist feminism is third-wave feminist and globalization critic, Naomi Klein (Klein 2008, 2000).
where young feminists of the developed and developing world intersect—cultural resources which can serve as sites of resistance to the still largely patriarchal forces of market and state.

Despite the frequent characterization of third-wave feminists as being in tension with their second-wave predecessors, third-wave feminists have emphasized continuities. Dickerson and Piepmeier observe that third-wave feminism may have “less to do with a neat generational divide than with a cultural context,” particularly the challenges of developing a “sense of identity in a world shaped by technology, capitalism, multiple modes of sexuality, changing national demographics, and declining economic vitality” (2003: 14). The difference might best be understood in noting that, whereas second-wave feminists emphasized that the “personal is political,” third-wave feminists added to this the conviction that the “global is local.” Second-wave feminism was not unconcerned with global issues (Morgan 1984, Smith 2000). Indeed, as we shall see, the earliest struggles for the international human rights of women developed as a result of second-wave feminist activism in such international organizations as the United Nations. But the emergence of third-wave feminism, concurrently with the end of the Cold War and the rise of the Internet and telecommunications era, has made global issues and global feminisms even more proximate to third-wave feminist concerns.

It is particularly through this pronounced globalism that third-wave feminism may be most effective in carrying feminism forward. But the emergence of the third wave has not come about without a certain amount of questioning of the nature of feminism, the diversity of women’s voices, and the scope of feminist concerns. For all of its emphasis on diversity, multiplicity, and global political agency, third-wave feminism has sometimes had difficulty embracing the legacy of second-wave feminism. As leading third-wave feminist Rebecca Walker has put it, “For many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn’t allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories. We fear that the identity will dictate and regulate our lives, instantaneously pitting us against someone, forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female against male, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad” (Dickerson and Piepmeier 2003: 15). Dickerson and Piepmeier confirm this sense of ambivalence regarding earlier modes of feminism, but they ultimately see great promise in the third wave, arguing, “At its best, the third wave embodies the rage and the joy of feminism. By taking much that is good from the second wave, listening to the critiques of earlier feminism’s lack of diversity, and responding to a changing world, the third wave has the potential to be the second wave’s better self” (2003: 20).

The emphasis on diversity and pluralism is crucial. From its inception, third-wave feminism has been committed to the inclusion of diverse issues and voices. Dickerson and Piepmeier describe third-wave feminism as a “reinvigorated feminist movement emerging from a late twentieth-century world” that is a “world of global capitalism and information technology, postmodernism and
postcolonialism, and environmental degradation.” In terms of issues, they argue, “We no longer live in the world that feminists of the second wave faced. Third wavers, who came of age in the late twentieth century and after, are therefore concerned not simply with ‘women’s issues’ but with a broad range of interlocking topics” (2003: 10). Third-wave feminism builds upon the second-wave discovery that “‘woman’ is an inadequate category because of the many differences among women,” along with the conviction that “feminism is not simply about women’s issues but is a broad-based political movement that seeks freedom for all those who are oppressed” (2003: 8). Third-wave feminism pays particular heed to the idea that “identity is intersectional,” the concept that “gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality are interlocking” and “oppression is not experienced simply along one axis” (2003: 9). As Dickerson and Piepmeier put it, “Just as it is interested in a multiplicity of issues, the third wave operates from the assumption that identity is multifaceted and layered. Since no monolithic view of ‘woman’ exists, we can no longer speak with confidence of ‘women’s issues’; instead we need to consider that such issues are as diverse as the many issues who inhabit our planet” (2003:10). In other words, third-wave feminists are “multiracial, multi-ethnic, and multi-issued” (2003:17).

When it comes to the prioritization of issues, some observers of third-wave feminism have noted a particular questioning of the priority of reproduction and motherhood as quintessential women’s issues. In the introduction to their anthology of critical essays on third-wave feminism, Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford observe that the “second generation of feminists concentrated on issues which specifically impacted upon women’s lives: reproduction, mothering, sexual violence, expressions of sexuality, and domestic labour” (2007: 1). In their view, one result of this emphasis has been that “third wave feminists tend to consider second wave feminism as triangulated in essentialism, universalism, and naturalism” (2007: xxiv). This triangulation is seen as circumscribing women’s interests within the sexual and domestic realms in a way that may presume a falsely universal experience of those roles, while also obscuring women’s activism on a range of concerns related to third generation rights that benefit women, men, children, and the planet as a whole. Reproduction and motherhood are acknowledged to be paramount and distinctive experiences in the lives of many women, but under a third-wave paradigm of diversity, multiplicity, and inclusivity, they must also be acknowledged to be experiences that not all women choose to experience or experience in the same way.6 Inquiry into third-wave feminist perspectives on third generation human rights in law and religion may help to

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6 The recent controversy over an article by former U.S. State Department Director of Policy Planning, Anne-Marie Slaughter, concerning her decision to step down from her position to return to academia and her family drew commentary from both second- and third-wave feminists (Slaughter 2012, Boyle 2012, Kantor 2012, Traister 2012, Dell’Antonia 2012, Covert 2012, Graff 2012, Belkin 2012, Valenti 201b). Third-wave feminist accounts of motherhood are just beginning to emerge (Crawford 2010b, Valenti 2012b).
uncover some of these other dimensions and concerns of feminist activism that inform some of the most crucial issues facing our world today.\(^7\)

“Mainstreaming Gender” in International Human Rights Law

Third generation rights concerns have, in fact, been percolating for some time in international human rights debates. The modern wave of attention to women’s human rights and the “mainstreaming of gender” in human rights began with the First World Conference on Women at Mexico City in 1975 and subsequent conferences at Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985. The women’s conferences focused on three main issues—equality, development and peace (UN 1975: Pt. III, Sec. VI). Anticipating key concerns at the later Cairo and Beijing conferences, the Mexico City conference report included resolutions on women and health, maternal and child health, family planning, the family, and principles of equality and nondiscrimination between men and women (UN 1975: Pt. I, Sec. III, Res. 5, 9, 15, and 17). Anticipating later third generation concerns about women, the environment, and climate change, the report included a number of provisions on the relation between women and development, with particular attention to the situation of rural women, whose lives are closely connected to issues of land, agriculture, and food provision (UN 1975: Pt. I, Sec. III, Res. 11, 12, 14, 15, 20, 22, 27).

The Mexico City report also specifically contemplated an enhanced role for women in securing the third generation right to peace. The report encouraged women’s study of government and international relations and their pursuit of careers in diplomacy, international civil service, and international and regional organizations, as well as participation in international forums on peace and in foreign policy decision-making. It urged governments to facilitate grassroots activities to provide women with opportunities to learn more about “international peace and co-operation, cultural understanding, self-reliance, [and] self-determination,” to become “better aware of political issues and concepts,” and to be “better equipped to resolve political problems,” particularly through the exchange of women leaders\(^8\) (UN 1975: Pt. I, Sec. III, Res. 28).

\(^7\) It should be noted that despite the dominance of third-wave feminism in the fields of women and gender studies, there has been surprisingly little representation in the study of law or religion. Despite the profound normative dimensions of feminism, law, and religion—three important interlocking areas of normativity for interdisciplinary feminist theory and consideration of women’s human rights—only a handful of books and articles have come forth to provide third-wave feminist perspectives in law and religion (Batlan et al. 2008, Klassen 2009, Crawford 2010a, 2010b, 2007).

\(^8\) The issue of women’s lesser role in international affairs policy-making persists even today, as exemplified in the Anne-Marie Slaughter affair. See note 6 above. Women’s peacemaking activities, however, are drawing increased notice. See, especially, the Women,
Another Mexico City resolution on peacemaking hints at distinctive motivations that women may have for peacemaking activity, noting that “the flames of war in the world have inflicted great pain, especially on women and children,” and that “the universal strengthening of world peace and the expansion of co-operation among States will advance the economic, social, and cultural development of the countries and serve the improvement of the situation of women.” The report observes that women are not only beneficiaries, but also agents of peace, thus endorsing the “broadest involvement of women in the struggle for the strengthening of international peace and the elimination of racism and racial discrimination” and the “role of women in the struggle against colonialism, racism and racial discrimination and the strengthening of international peace and co-operation among States” (UN 1975: Pt. I–III, Sec. 29 (emphases added)). The Mexico City report thus emphasized women’s agency in matters that included, but also extended beyond, their reproductive and maternal roles.

The report of the Second World Conference on Women, held in Copenhagen in 1980, by contrast, devoted considerable attention to women’s reproductive health, including the necessity of adequate access to family planning and the need for an integrated approach to women’s health and welfare (UN 1980: Ch. I, B, 1 and Ch. I, B, 14). Reflecting tensions that had begun to emerge between conservative and liberal groups over issues of feminism and the family, the Copenhagen report was careful to note the familial—and specifically the maternal—dimensions of women’s peacemaking capabilities. The report affirmed that “the family, as a basic unit of society, remains an important factor of social, political, and cultural change” and maintained that “preparation for peace starts with and in the family, where women and men should be encouraged to instill in their children the values of mutual respect and understanding for all peoples” (UN 1980: Pt. I, B, 7, preamble and (4) (emphases added)). The role of the state in empowering women’s peacemaking functions, in the public capacities contemplated in the Mexico City report, was specifically conditioned on the state’s “due regard for the constitutional rights and role of the family” (UN 1980: Pt. I, B, 7(7) (emphasis added)). In addition to seeming to circumscribe women’s peacemaking activities within the family, the Copenhagen report included a number of sections on women in various categories of vulnerability that, while certainly drawing needed attention to these groups in ways that responded to real issues of deprivation, also tipped the balance somewhat from an emphasis on women’s agency to women’s victimization.9 The

9 The referenced groups include migrant women (I, B, 3), elderly women (I, B, 4), battered women (I, B, 5), and refugee and displaced women (I, B, 12–13). The preference for “power” feminisms over “victim” feminisms in the third wave may be simply a reflection of the cultural power and sense of invulnerability of the young, particularly in nations of the
reduction of women to victimhood, without an adequate account of their capacity for agency even in conditions of constraint, is one that third-wave feminists have been particularly concerned to address.

The report of the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 continued the triple emphasis on equality, development, and peace. A chapter on equality noted the persistence of “a deeply rooted resistance on the part of conservative elements in society to the change in attitude necessary for a total ban on discriminatory practices against women at the family, local, national and international levels” (UN 1985: para. 50). A chapter on development described global economic recessions as “having a negative impact on an already unbalanced distribution of income, as well as on the high levels of unemployment, which affect women more than men,” particularly in developing countries where the effects “have caused serious difficulties in the process of integrating women into development.”

This was especially the case where women experienced disparate impact of climate change and environmental degradation in areas “afflicted by drought, famine, and desertification” (UN 1985: para. 99). The Nairobi report attributed a significant amount of global underdevelopment to gender injustice in the family, in observing, “Despite significant efforts in many countries to transfer tasks traditionally performed by women to men or to public services, traditional attitudes still persist and in fact have contributed to the increased burden of work placed on women” (UN 1985: para. 101). There was also attention to the rising number of families supported by single mothers and the double burden of economic and domestic support that single mothers must necessarily assume. (UN 1985: paras. 294–5). With such concerns in mind, the Nairobi report recommended a variety of measures “to enhance women’s autonomy, bringing women into the mainstream of the development process on an equal basis with men, or other measures designed to integrate women fully in the total development effort” (UN 1985: para. 111).

developing world. But it has spawned discussions of the ethical peril of treating victimized women solely as victims in ways that overlook their sources and strategies of agency. These points were heavily emphasized at a workshop on “Gender Based Violence in Liberia,” convened by the Institute for Developing Nations and the Carter Center at Emory University in June 2008, which brought together a number of young women human rights activists from Liberia and the US for a daylong conference. For an excellent discussion of these themes of vulnerability and agency in feminist philosophy, see Tessman 2005.

10 The Nairobi Report, of course, focused on the global recession of the early 1980s. In the recent recession that began in 2007–2008, which has been described as a “he-cession,” men seem to have fared worse initially in the loss of traditionally male jobs, though those jobs seem also to have come back more quickly in the limited recovery. (Salam 2009, Romano and Dokoupil 2010, Rosin 2012).

11 This concern about women and the environment and the gender disparate effects of environmental degradation and climate change has grown since Nairobi (Aboud 2012, Dankelman 2010, Dankelman 2009).

12 In the interim between the Copenhagen and Nairobi conferences, in 1981, the UN passed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
The analysis of women’s development, thus, blended domestic and environmental concerns, but with a return of the Mexico City emphasis on women’s autonomy and agency.

The Cairo Conference (ICPD) combined concerns for gender equity with sustainable development in a way that put women at the forefront of population and development debates. The ICPD became infamous in the eyes of conservative religious and political groups for its provisions on gender, family, and sexual and reproductive health (UN 1994: Chs. 4, 5, and 7). These included lengthy recommendations concerning controversial matters of family planning, contraception, and the right to abortion. Indeed, reproductive health became such a focus at Cairo that it seemed to some observers, even those who supported the ICPD, as if the procreative capacity of the world’s women was being blamed for underdevelopment. As the Catholic reproductive choice and health advocate, Frances Kissling, has observed in connection with Cairo and other UN population conferences, women from the developing world have rightly raised questions about sustainable development programs in which “reducing their numbers is seen as an easier solution than compelling those of us in the developed world to reduce our consumption, or forcing corporations to stop clear-cutting forests” (Kissling 2009). This concern was echoed by other religious observers and women’s groups from the developing world.

But for conservative religious groups, including a notable alliance of Catholics and Muslims at Cairo, there were other problems, as well. The Catholic-Muslim alliance, along with other Christian conservative groups, objected to the ICPD passages on sexual and reproductive health for “individuals and couples” as (CEDAW) (UN 1981). CEDAW reads primarily as a first and second generation rights document, emphasizing the need for equality and nondiscrimination in the protection of women’s rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. In this respect, the CEDAW was more redundant than radical.

Nonetheless, from the outset, CEDAW was controversial among conservative religious groups. Under the notable influence of conservative Christian groups, who had fought the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution, the United States declined to ratify CEDAW—and still has not, even today. A number of Muslim nations appended reservations to provisions thought to be in contravention of the Islamic Sharia, particularly in the areas of gender, sexuality, and family. But the controversies that accompanied the adoption of CEDAW would pale in comparison to those spawned by the Cairo and Beijing conferences of the mid-1990s (Green 2011, Goldberg 2009, Butler 2006, Bayes and Tohidi 2001).

13 The ICPD was organized by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), separately from the women’s conferences, which were organized predecessors of the body which has since 2010 been known as UN Women.

14 It should be noted that there were liberal and progressive women’s groups at both Cairo and Beijing, but as supporters, rather than opponents, of the Cairo and Beijing platforms, they tended to receive less attention (Butler 2006).
sanctioning sexuality outside of marriage, on gender egalitarianism in marital and familial matters as disruptive of gender complementarity, and on the rights of adolescents and girls as interfering with the authority of parents over their children. A year later, many of these gender and sexuality issues at Cairo were taken up at the Beijing Conference.

Echoing earlier women’s conferences, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action announced a broad concern to “advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity,” to acknowledge “the voices of all women everywhere and tak[e] note of the diversity of women and their roles and circumstances,” and to recognize that “the status of women has advanced in some important respects in the past decade but that progress has been uneven, inequalities between women and men have persisted and major obstacles remain, with serious consequences for the well-being of all people” (UN 1995: paras. 3–5). The Beijing Declaration emphasized that “explicit recognition and reaffirmation of the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment” and insisted on the need to develop “efficient and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including development policies and programmes, at all levels that will foster the empowerment and advancement of women” (UN 1995: paras. 17 and 19). But, in apparent response to concerns voiced by women in the developing world about the quasi-eugenic dimensions of family planning and population programs at Cairo, the Beijing Declaration maintained, “Eradication of poverty based on sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice requires the involvement of women in economic and social development, equal opportunities and the full and equal participation of women and men as agents and beneficiaries of people-centered sustainable development” (UN 1995: paras. 6 and 16 (emphasis added)).

In addressing the “feminization of poverty” that has accompanied globalization in recent decades, the Beijing Declaration promised to “eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women by addressing the structural causes of poverty through changes in economic structures, ensuring equal access for all women, including those in rural areas, as vital development agents, to productive resources, opportunities and public services” (UN 1995: paras. 26, 47–68, 246–58). The Beijing Declaration explicitly linked women’s rights and economic development to concerns for environmental sustainability in observing how “[t]hrough their management and use of natural resources, women provide sustenance to their families and communities. As consumers and producers, caretakers of their families and educators, women play an important role in promoting sustainable development through their concern for the quality and sustainability of life for present and future generations” (UN 1995: para. 248). The Beijing Conference also followed earlier women’s conferences in noting the inextricable connections between peace and women’s advancement, noting particularly that, “During times of armed conflict and the collapse of communities, the role of women is crucial. They often work to preserve social order in the midst
of armed and other conflicts. Women make an important but often unrecognized contribution as peace educators both in their families and in their societies” (UN 1995: para. 139).

In addition to articulating rights to reproductive health and gender equity, the Cairo and Beijing conferences both addressed a comprehensive list of concerns affecting the world’s women—a fact that was often lost in the controversies over sexual matters. These included third generation rights to poverty alleviation, peace, and environmental sustainability, along with the land rights for rural women, the cultural rights of indigenous women, and even women’s right to religious freedom (UN 1994: para. 25, UN 1995: para. 12). In a sense, as important as reproductive health and gender equity are to women’s human rights, it is regrettable that the Cairo and Beijing conferences were so dominated by matters of sex and gender, as this emphasis has tended to obscure women’s human rights and capacity for agency in matters extending beyond their embodied relations.

Third-wave reflections on women’s human rights following Cairo and Beijing have reflected something of this ambivalence. While third-wave feminists in the U.S. who came of age during the Clinton Administration witnessed international attention to women’s human rights with high levels of government support and participation, the large-scale U.S. pullout from the UN during the Bush Administration resulted in diminished interest by third-wave feminists in the 2000s (Vanessa 2004). As one third-wave feminist wrote at the influential third-wave feminist blog Feministing, “Although it’s disappointing, I’m not too surprised when I hear folks express apathy/cynicism towards the UN in general and the CSW [Commission on the Status of Women] in particular, especially since I myself have harbored those same kinds of feelings towards the UN in the past. It can seem like with all the acronyms and jargon being used, many delegates don’t want members of civil society to get involved, or that they are creating a deliberate barrier for non-UN folks to get to the content. It can also sometimes feel like the progress being made there isn’t real or important, since things move so. slowlyyyyyyy. sometimes” (Lori 2010). Jessica Valenti, founder of Feministing, has continuously raised issues pertaining to the UN women’s conferences on the blog, but has also acknowledged her readership’s low level of interest.15

Among third-wave feminists who do follow UN proceedings on Cairo, Beijing, and their follow-up meetings, a perceived emphasis on population control continues to draw criticism. Commenting on the UNFPA’s 2011 World Population Day events, one third-wave blogger wrote, “I was happy to see that their messaging wasn’t too focused on population control … . While the number of people on earth is obviously an important factor in sustainability, climate change and resources, the more important element is often use of resources. In that regard,

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15 Before the Beijing+10 conference, Valenti wrote, “I know a lot of folks aren’t really into the UN processes (for varying reasons), but this meeting should be really interesting.” (Valenti 2005). In another posting, she provides links to resources on the UN Commission on the Status of Women, to bring her readers up to speed (Valenti 2009).
it’s countries like the United States that have a greater environmental impact than countries with population booms currently” (Miriam 2011). Third-wave feminists are more receptive to population and development agendas when they are connected to issues of peace and the environment. As one third-wave feminist working at the intersection of population, development, and environmental issues writes, “[f]or many people, the ties between environmental activism and sexual health or reproductive rights aren’t obvious—unless, of course, they’ve heard the mainstream line that global overpopulation is the root of resource scarcity, poverty, war and, most recently, climate change. We need to ask hard questions about who is targeted as needing to control their family size, and whether accepting the threatening framework of overpopulation is really in the best interest of our feminist and environmentalist organizations” (Bryson 2010). Third-wave feminists have also grown up witnessing, in Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur, and the Congo, some of the most execrable abuses of women’s rights through rape and sexual violence in the context of conflict and war in a way that has lent a certain urgency to their connection of reproductive health issues and questions of war and peace. As one third-wave blogger writes, noting the emergence of new international initiatives on women and conflict, “[t]hough we have long known that conflict and war are dangerous for women, noting the specific conflicts and organizations that contribute to violence against women is an important shift for the international community. … But it is an important step for international institutions like the UN, that have peace-building resources at their disposal to know that an important part of creating peace is creating safety for women in war zones, conflict areas and post-conflict areas” (Pandit 2012). Third-wave feminists remain committed to rights pertaining to sex, gender, and reproductive health, but they also bring new critical perspectives that connect these matters to third generation rights to peace, development, and environmental sustainability. They may not be as involved in or aware of the UN and other international organizations as they should be, but this is not for lack of global interest. Third-wave feminists may, in fact, be an important target audience for outreach by international women’s rights organizations.

Third-Wave Feminist “Foremothers” of Faith

Even new movements have histories and precedents, and there are a number of twentieth- and twenty-first century women around the world, whose lives and work anticipate the concerns of third-wave feminism and third generation rights in crucial ways—while also invoking a faith factor that is still lacking in the “spiritual, but not religious” precincts of third-wave feminism. The perspectives of these women are importantly informed by feminism and faith—sometimes as motivation, sometimes retrospectively—in ways that acknowledge the ambivalence of both of these normative resources, while at the same time drawing upon them in seeking legal, political, social change on a range of third generation right issues. In their connection of “women’s issues” to national and global issues
of poverty, peace, culture, environment, development and human rights, these women were ahead of their time in ways that can serve as a historical backdrop to the activism of today’s third-wave feminists.

_Dorothy Day_

Dorothy Day (1897–1980) was an adult convert to Catholicism whose journalistic career and social activism changed the face of twentieth-century advocacy on issues of poverty, homelessness, and peace through the Catholic Worker movement and the “houses of hospitality” for the poor and homeless that she established with her fellow activist Peter Maurin. Her early adult life evinces some of the imperfection that third-wave feminists have sought to claim against the supposed mandatory purity of second-wave feminism, including a cohabiting love affair that led to pregnancy and abortion, a short-lived marriage and divorce on the rebound, and a common-law marriage that resulted in the birth of a daughter, Tamar. Day’s partner was triply opposed to religion, marriage, and offspring—eventually abandoning his common-law wife and child in a way that freed Day to pursue single motherhood and spiritual pursuits in the embrace of the Catholic Church.16 Day baptized her daughter as a Catholic and soon after was baptized and confirmed herself, later in life becoming an oblate, or lay member, of the Benedictine monastic order. In life, Day had inveighed, “Don’t call me a saint—I don’t want to be dismissed that easily.” Even so, Pope John Paul II opened her candidacy for sainthood in 2000.

Despite her famous quip against sainthood, a number of Day’s writings reveal a particular interest in saints as emblematic of activism and engagement in the world. In her autobiography, _The Long Loneliness_, Day asks at one point, “Why was so much done in the name of remedying evil instead of avoiding it in the first place? … Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves but to do away with the slavery?”17 (Day 1952: 45). In a more positive spirit, she wrote elsewhere, as if answering her own question, “There are many saints here, there, and everywhere and not only the canonized saints that Rome draws to our attention” (Forest 2011: 118). There are hints in these remarks of a call for the kind of structural change that has been a hallmark of the third-wave feminist movement, as well as a redefinition of saintliness away

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16 Some have speculated that Day’s relationships with emotionally unavailable men may have been a repetition of her relationship to her father, a sports journalist, who has been described as “remote” and “deeply disapproving” of his daughter’s religious and political commitments. On the other hand, Day is said to have had a close relationship with her mother (Forest 2011: 5, 23).

17 Some of the interest in saints came from Day’s _Catholic Worker_ co-founder Peter Maurin, who recommended study of the saints and was likely behind the distinctive iconography of the _Catholic Worker_’s illustrations, which featured saints engaged in manual labor (Forest 2012: 107, 126–7).
from a detached perfectionism and toward a sometimes messy engagement with the world.

Day spent her early adulthood building a name for herself as a writer for various socialist and anarchist newspapers and journals in New York and Chicago. Her conversion to Catholicism estranged her from fellow activists in these movements, leaving her in a situation of having “a religious faith and social conscience, but no community” (Forest 2011: 99). Even her own conversion seemed increasingly to be cast into doubt, for she wrote, “[h]ow little, how puny my work had been since becoming a Catholic, I thought. How self-centered, how ingrown, how lacking in a sense of community!” (Day 1952: 165). This was a painful realization for someone whose faith centered on the idea that, “We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community” (Day 1980: 4).

Day’s personal epiphany prompted her to ask questions of her church, as well. In reporting on a Hunger March on Washington organized by her former socialist and communist associates, she wrote, “I could write, I could protest, to arouse the conscience, but where was the Catholic leadership in the gathering of bands of men and women together for the actual works of mercy that the comrades had always made part of their technique in reaching the workers?” (Day 1952: 165). The Catholic Worker began in New York in 1933, the fourth year of the Great Depression, with a mission to let people know “that the Catholic Church has a social program,” including people “who [were] working not only for their spiritual, but for their material welfare” (Forest 2011: 3). By all accounts, Day would have fully supported the recent Occupy Wall Street protests, which drew notable participation from third-wave feminists committed to third generation rights in the global economy.18

Day’s economic and political views were radical, but her views of sexuality and family were conservative—so much so that some have questioned whether she can be considered to be feminist19 (O’Connor 1991). Toward the end of her life, Day remarked of the second-wave feminism of the time, “[w]omen’s liberation is too self-centered. It’s not geared to the poor but to articulate middle-class women with time on their hands, the ones who have the least to complain about” (Scott 1992: 34). Her views were almost certainly born of lessons that she had learned the hard way in her own romantic life. She maintained that the “institution of marriage has been built up by society as well as the Church to safeguard the home and children as well as people who don’t know how to take care of themselves” and


19 The Our Inner Lives project of Feminist.com, a third-wave feminist website, includes a webpage on Day, claiming her as one of its Women of Vision. See http://www.feminist.com/ourinnerlives/wv_dorothy_day.html.
that “promiscuity and looseness in sex is an ugly and inharmonious thing” (Scott 1992: 34). Indeed, she argued, “[s]ex is not at all taboo with me except outside of marriage …. [B]ut sex having such a part in life as producing children, has been restricted as society and the Church have felt best for the children” (Scott 1992: 34).

Day also subscribed to views of gender difference undergirded by the Catholic doctrine of complementarity, manifest in the different approaches she and Maurin took in leading the Catholic Worker movement. These views were especially pronounced in Day’s writing about motherhood. Reflecting her own experience and echoing the Apostle Paul, Day wrote that, “woman is saved by child-bearing,” which imposes a “rule of life which involves others” through which “she will be saved in spite of herself” (Forest: 116). This sexual conservatism would not seem to fit with third-wave feminism’s liberal sexual views and the tendency toward solipsism that characterizes today’s society, saturated as it is with personal revelation and frequent self-interest. But upon closer comparison, Day’s concern for women’s interests in sexual relationships, coupled with her own affirmation of the value of sexuality, mirrors third-wave feminist concerns about pornographic objectification of women, a persistent rape culture, and the international sexual and economic trafficking of women—the dark side of sexuality in a context of neoliberalism and globalization.

**Rigoberta Menchú Tum**

Rigoberta Menchú Tum is a Guatemalan of the Quiche indigenous ethnic group who became a leader in promoting the rights of Guatemala’s indigenous peoples during and after the long Guatemalan Civil War (1960–96).20 Menchú received the Nobel Peace Prize of 1992 for promoting the rights of indigenous peoples. The Guatemalan Civil War was largely a war between the various military-led governments and leftist movements supported by many indigenous groups. Menchú’s testimonial biography, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, in addition to testifying to the various human rights violations inflicted on indigenous people by the military, also describes the postcolonial economic and cultural rights struggles of Guatemala’s indigenous peoples 21 (Stoll 1998, Arias 2001, Golden 1999, Wilson 1999, Rohter 1998).

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20 Details of Menchú ‘s life and work are taken primarily from her autobiographies., Menchú, 1984 and 1998, as well as the documentary film *When the Mountains Tremble*.

21 Menchú’s testimonial came under dispute in the late 1990s as scholars and journalists uncovered information that cast doubt on some of the actual facts of her narrative. Other scholars (Grandin 2010) and Menchú herself have defended the account as an example of the Latin American narrative form of *testimonio* in which stories of the community as a whole are integrated into the accounts of individual narrators. The Nobel Prize Committee has defended its award to Menchú as being based on the effectiveness of work on behalf of indigenous rights, rather than on the strict authenticity of her narrative.
Menchú’s father, a farmer who had also been part of an anti-government guerilla movement, was killed during the Civil War, along with her brother and other family and ethnic community members. Educated at Catholic schools through the eighth grade, Menchú has cited the bible as the “main weapon” in the education and mobilization of the indigenous people in their war against oppression and for economic, social, and cultural rights. She describes the movement that she started in these terms:

We began to study the Bible as our main text . . . . The important thing for us is that we started to identify that reality with our own . . . . It also helped to change the image we had, as Catholics and Christians: that God is up there and that God has a great kingdom for we the poor, yet never thinking of our own reality as a reality that we were actually living . . . . We began studying more deeply and we came to a conclusion. That being a Christian means thinking of our brothers around us, and that every one of our Indian race has a right to eat . . . . And it’s precisely when we look at the lives of Christians in the past that we see what our role as Christians should be today. (Menchú 1984: 131–3).

Menchú grounds her activism not only in the terms of liberation theology, but also in the language of feminist maternalism, observing, “[t]here is something important about women in Guatemala, especially Indian women, and that something is her relationship with the earth—between the earth and the mother. . . . There is a constant dialogue between the earth and the woman. The feeling is born in women because of the responsibilities they have, which men do not have” (Menchú 1984: 220). At the same time, noting her own unmarried and childless status, Menchú has resisted defining the movement in terms of purely maternalistic or gynocentric concepts of feminism and women’s rights. On this


22 Menchú admits in her testimonial to feeling “slightly more love” for her father, but dedicates a chapter to the lessons and values that she learned from her mother (Menchú 1984: 236). Her paternal relationship falls between Day’s rockiness and Aung San Suu Kyi’s reverence.

23 At one point she explains this as the result of a childhood decision to forego marriage and motherhood because she was “afraid of life” and the possibility of conditions of responsibility and suffering that mothers experienced toward their children, in light of the harshness of life in her community (Menchú 1984: 220).
point, she has maintained, “[p]erhaps in the future, when there’s a need for it, there will be a women’s organisation in Guatemala. For the time being, though, we think that it would be feeding machismo to set up an organisation for women only, since it would mean separating women’s work from men’s work. Also we’ve found that when we discuss women’s problems, we need the men to be present, so that they can contribute by giving their opinions of what to do about the problem and so that they can learn as well. If they don’t learn, they don’t progress” (Menchú 1984: 222). The appeal to feminist maternalism is not an argument that has appealed to third-wave feminists (Valenti 2012: ch. 4). But concerns for partnership with men, emphasized for decades by the UN women’s conferences, do have third-wave appeal24 (see, e.g., Vanessa 2009, Urban 2012). Menchú herself is also mentioned frequently and with appreciation in the third-wave blog literature (see, e.g., Ann 2007, Pandit 2012, Maya 2012).

Wangari Maathai

In 2004, the Kenyan environmental and political activist Wangari Maathai became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Much as Menchú’s prize had highlighted connections between the justice and rights for indigenous people to the larger goal of peace, Maathai’s award drew needed attention to the connections between peace, democracy, and sustainable development. Maathai, like Menchú, received a Catholic education at primary and secondary schools in Kenya and later at a Catholic women’s college in the United States. She studied biological sciences and earned a doctorate in anatomy, eventually becoming the first East African woman to earn a doctoral degree. While on the faculty of the University of Nairobi, she campaigned for equal employment benefits for women faculty and staff and became involved in a number of civic organizations, including the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK), which she would eventually chair. Her environmental work began in the 1970s under the auspices of the United Nations Environmental Program, leading to a project called Envirocare which put the unemployed to work planting trees to conserve the environment. Connections through the United Nations Human Settlements Program (HABITAT) eventually provided Maathai with funds to pay Kenyan women small stipends to plant nurseries and trees in the first “Green Belt” initiative, later the Green Belt Movement, for which Maathai would earn the Nobel Prize.

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Amid these various initiatives, there were personal and political challenges—a bitter divorce, a job abroad that required Maathai to leave her three children to live with her former spouse, politically orchestrated opposition to her assuming the chairmanship of the NCWK to which she had been elected, denial of eligibility to run for a Parliamentary seat, and even eviction from her university-owned housing. Maathai’s Green Belt Movement attained international visibility in 1985 at the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, but this led to persecution at home. Maathai and her organization were denounced by the Kenyan government throughout the 1980s and 1990s for preaching democracy along with environmentalism. In 1992 Maathai was arrested with other pro-democracy activists in an action that drew international attention and elicited statements by Vice President Al Gore and Senator Edward Kennedy in the United States on her behalf. Upon her release, Maathai participated in a hunger strike by a group of Kenyan mothers on behalf of those still in prison and was subjected to forcible removal by the police. Once dispersed, the protest was resumed at All Saints Cathedral, the seat of the Anglican Archbishop in Kenya. The relocation of the protest to the church drew criticism, but it also appears to have reconfirmed, for Maathai, the power of the Church to act on behalf of justice. In 2002 Maathai was elected to the Kenyan Parliament with 98 percent of the vote and was subsequently appointed Assistant Minister in the Ministry for Environment and Natural Resources, a position that she held from 2003–2005. In 2005 she was elected the first president of the African Union’s Economic, Social and Cultural Council, and she has continued to draw international honors and international attention, including a visit from then-Senator Barack Obama during the course of which Maathai and Obama planted a tree at Uhuru Park, the central Nairobi green space that had been the site of many of Maathai’s democratic protests. In 2011, Maathai died from ovarian cancer.

A year before she died, Maathai published a spiritual memoir of her environmental work, titled *Replenishing the Earth* (2010). In it she wrote, “[u]pon reflection, it is clear to me that when I began this work in 1977, I wasn’t motivated by my faith or by religion in general. Instead, the motivation came from thinking literally and practically about how to solve problems on the ground. It was a desire to help rural populations, especially women, with the basic needs they described to me during seminars and workshops … . So, when these questions were asked during the early days, I’d answer that I didn’t think digging holes and mobilizing communities to protect or restore the trees, forests, watersheds, soil, or habitats for wildlife that surrounded them was spiritual work or only relevant to the religious” (Maathai 2010: 13). At the same time, she maintained, “[p]ersonally, however, I never differentiated between activities that might be called ‘spiritual’ and those that might be termed ‘secular.’ After a few years I came to recognize that our efforts weren’t only about planting trees, but were also about sowing seeds of a different sort—the ones necessary to heal the wounds inflicted on communities that robbed them of their self-confidence and self-knowledge. What became clear was that individuals within these communities had to rediscover their authentic
voice and speak out on behalf of their rights (human, environmental, civic, and political)” (Maathai 2010: 14).

Maathai identified as the Four Core Values of the Green Belt Movement: (1) love for the environment, (2) gratitude and respect for Earth’s resources, (3) self-empowerment and self-betterment, and a (4) spirit of service and volunteerism. Of the last, she observed, drawing on the same saintly trope as Day, that service and volunteerism involve a “giving of self that characterizes prophets, saints, and many local heroes” and “puts a priority on doing one’s part to achieve the common good: both for those who are near and dear and for strangers who may be in faraway places” (Maathai: 2010: 15). Maathai attributed this emphasis on service to the education that she received from missionary nuns, of whom she said, “probably the greatest lesson they gave me is not so much what they were talking about, as the way they lived. I really admired their sense of service, sense of self-giving and when I look back, that’s what was probably the greatest lesson” (Schnall 2008). And as Maathai later observed in Replenishing the Earth, “[s]elfless service is the basis for much of what we admire in those we see as exemplars of what is best in humanity—people who represent a model of not only self-empowerment but also of how to motivate others to act for the common good.” (Maathai 2010: 158).

Maathai referenced both Dorothy Day and Aung San Suu Kyi as among those who have exemplified such service (Maathai 2010: 158–9).

Balance between proximate and remote needs, between self-giving and self-sacrifice, and between women’s traditional care families and desire to be agents in the wider world, are paramount feminist issues, though Maathai does not name them as such. Both Maathai’s faith motivation and her feminist underpinnings seem to have been recognized, to a certain extent, retrospectively, and with a strong dose of religious ecumenism and realism about what women’s organizations can accomplish. While “neither a theologian nor a student of religions or faith traditions,” Maathai argued that from both a spiritual and a humanistic perspective “the environment becomes sacred, because to destroy what is essential to life is to destroy life itself,” and that, because of this connection between spiritual values and nature, “people who are religious should be closest to the planet and in the forefront of recognizing that it needs healing” (Maathai 2010: 19, 18). There is a postcolonial syncretism in Maathai’s intentional incorporation of traditional Kikuyu principles and examples to supplement the Christian principles that are predominant in Kenya today—traditional concepts which she notes were considered “primitive” by the missionaries whose education otherwise served her so well.

Asked about the connections between women and the environment, Maathai initially framed the connection in some of the same maternalistic terms that Day and Menchú use in describing women’s connection to salvation and the earth, respectively. Maathai explained,
It was almost by coincidence—well, it was not really a coincidence, it was almost by—it had to be that way … in that part of Africa, it’s the women who actually are the first victims of environmental degradation, because they are the ones who fetch water, so if there is no water, it is them who walk for days—or for hours I should say—looking for water. They are the ones who fetch firewood. They are the ones who produce food for their families. So it’s easy for them to explain when the environment is degraded and to persuade them to take action, because they can see where it will impact them directly positively (Schnall 2008).

In a similar vein of pragmatism about the feminist project, Maathai remarked,

I think that sometimes we romanticize the role that the women can play, because women in many countries of the world, women are still not in charge. They are still not playing a very important role in decision-making. But sometimes when women do find themselves in those positions, we really don’t see that much difference. And I have always felt that perhaps women have sometimes almost embraced the same values as men, and the same character as men, because they are in the men’s world, and they are trying to fit into a system that men have created (Schnall 2008).

These senses of serendipity and pragmatism in Maathai’s feminism may seem discordant with the sense of idealism and intentional agency that shape feminism and other social movements. But it may be the case that Maathai herself, like the nuns who inspired her, has inspired feminist accolades not so much for her feminist articulations, as through her lived struggle for principles of ecofeminism on the ground—and in the ground, in the trees of hope and peace that her movement has planted across Africa. Maathai has certainly been warmly received by third-wave feminists of the blogosphere (Sapra 2011, Church 2011, Valenti 2004, Vanessa 2004).

**Aung San Suu Kyi**

Aung San Suu Kyi is a democracy activist who spent nearly two decades in more or less continuous house arrest in Burma after becoming a leader of the Burmese democratic revolution in 1988. In 1990, her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won enough votes to guarantee them nearly 80 percent of the seats in Parliament. It was thought that Suu Kyi might have served as Prime Minister, but the controlling military government did not recognize the election results and Suu Kyi was kept in confinement. During brief periods of liberation from house arrest in 1996 and 2002, motorcades in which she was riding with fellow NLD leaders were attacked by mobs allegedly paid by the military government. In 2007, Suu Kyi made a brief public appearance outside her home to support Buddhist monks who were marching in support of human rights in the democratic protests that came to be referred to as the “Saffron Revolution.” In
2010, Suu Kyi was released for the last time, and in April 2012 she was finally elected to Parliament.

Suu Kyi was the third child and only daughter of Aung San, the military and political leader who negotiated Burma’s independence from the British Empire in 1947. That same year, when Suu Kyi was just two years old, her father was assassinated by political rivals during a meeting to form a new government. Aung San is still revered by the Burmese people as an independence leader and founder of modern Burma. After her father’s death, Suu Kyi’s mother, Khin Kyi, was appointed ambassador to India and Nepal and Suu Kyi, having attended Methodist and Catholic schools in her youth, accompanied her mother to complete her secondary school education and pursue university studies in India. Suu Kyi completed further university studies in politics, philosophy, and economics at Oxford, after which she moved to New York to work at the United Nations. She returned to Britain three years later to marry Michael Aris, an Oxford scholar of Tibetan culture. Suu Kyi gave birth to two sons before resuming her studies and earning a doctorate in Burmese literature from the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London.

In 1985, Suu Kyi returned to Burma alone to care for her dying mother, but quickly became involved in the democracy protests of August 8, 1988, as heir to her father’s revolutionary aims. Her leadership status was confirmed in an address before a half million protesters at Rangoon’s landmark Shwedagon Pagoda on August 26, 1988, in which Suu Kyi drew on both Mahatma Gandhi’s principles of nonviolence and traditional Buddhist concepts. She was placed under house arrest in 1989. Half a world and conditions of near-continuous house arrest separated Suu Kyi from her husband, who was permitted to visit Suu Kyi in Burma five times. Tragically, his last visit in 1995 was followed by a cancer diagnosis in 1997 and death in 1999. Suu Kyi’s second son, Kim Aris, was permitted to visit her in 2010 for the first time in nearly twenty-five years (Stanford 2012). Kim Aris welcomed his mother back to the United Kingdom and introduced her to her grandchildren in the summer of 2012 during Suu Kyi’s first trip back to Europe since 1998.

A Theravada Buddhist, Suu Kyi has cited Buddhist principles as playing a key role in sustaining her through her years of imprisonment and as being the foundation of her commitments to democracy and development. When she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her “non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights,” her older son, Alexander Aris, accepted on her behalf. In his remarks, Aris spoke powerfully of his mother’s peace activism, stating, “I personally believe that by her own dedication and personal sacrifice she has come to be a worthy symbol through whom the plight of all the people of Burma may be recognised”25

25 In a rare 2004 interview, Kim Aris also spoke of his mother with pride, saying “At the end of the day, freedom for Burma was the most important thing for her. I have to respect her reasoning. It wasn’t easy, but I am proud she took that decision” (Stanford 2012).
Citing his mother’s writings on the negative correspondence of fear and freedom, “within the military government there are those to whom the present policies of fear and repression are abhorrent, violating as they do the most sacred principles of Burma’s Buddhist heritage” (Stanford 2012, citing Suu Kyi 1991: 183, 185, 174) Those writings were collected under the title *Freedom from Fear*, after an eponymous article released for publication to commemorate Suu Kyi’s 1990 receipt of the European Parliament’s Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. In those writings, Suu Kyi makes frequent reference to Buddhist principles as a source of human rights. She observes that the “quintessential revolution is that of the spirit, born of an intellectual conviction of the need for change in those mental attitudes and values which shape the course of a nation’s development” and requiring “sacrifices in the name of enduring truths, to resist the corrupting influences of desire, ill will, ignorance and fear” (Suu Kyi 1991: 183). At one point, in an interesting affinity with Day and Maathai over the exemplary power of saints, Suu Kyi observes, “Saints, it has been said, are the sinners who go on trying” (Suu Kyi 1991: 183).

There is certain emphasis on perfectionism in Suu Kyi’s philosophy, perhaps reflective of the saint-like status that she has assumed in the eyes of her own people for her sacrifices of family and freedom on behalf of the nation. She observes, “[t]he fearlessness may be a gift but perhaps more precious is the courage acquired through endeavour, courage that comes from cultivating the habit of refusing to let fear dictate one’s actions, courage that could best be describes as ‘grace under pressure’—grace which is renewed repeatedly in the face of harsh, unremitting pressure” (Suu Kyi 1991: 184). Upon receiving the Nobel Prize in person at last in the summer of 2012, Suu Kyi noted, “[a]bsolute peace in our world is an unattainable goal. But it is one towards which we must continue to journey, our eyes fixed on it as a traveller in a desert fixes his eyes on the one guiding star that will lead him to salvation. Even if we do not achieve perfect peace on earth, because perfect peace is not of this earth, common endeavours to gain peace will unite individuals and nations in trust and friendship and help to make our human community safer and kinder” (Suu Kyi 2012).

Suu Kyi’s speeches, writings, and activism have sometimes been described as lacking a distinctly feminist perspective and as conforming to “Southeast Asian constructions of the feminine as ‘moral guardian’” (Rosenzweig et al. 2006). In a video address to guests at the Feminist Majority Foundation’s Global Women’s Rights Awards event, at which she was awarded the Eleanor Roosevelt award for her work on democracy and human rights in Burma, Suu Kyi remarked, “I believe women play the more important part in our world because not only are they entering the professional world, they still remain the pillars of their homes and families. So I hope the menfolk in this audience will forgive me for speaking in favor of women—for speaking out in favor of women—because I think only a woman can understand the troubles, the problems, the discrimination that other women have to face” (Hallett 2011). These remarks have certain poignant datedness, coming forty years after the great flow of middle- and upper-class women from home into
the workforce, but, of course, Suu Kyi was imprisoned under house arrest for half of this time. They also have a certain maternalistic quality, perhaps reflective of the “moral guardian” tradition, but Suu Kyi notably sacrificed decades of maternal experience for the work of democracy. In that sense, she may have been the ultimate working mother by the standards of the work-family choices that women are still regularly called to make today. What signals her solidarity with the global feminism from which she was isolated for so long is her invitation in accepting the Eleanor Roosevelt award that “from this day onwards, until all the people in the world, particularly all the women in the world, are able to achieve their full potential, I hope we will be able to work together closely and in the true spirit of sisterhood” (Hallett 2011). Even though her imprisonment predated the inception of the third wave, the recent attention to Suu Kyi’s release and election to Parliament by third-wave feminists suggests an affinity with her work (Bahadur 2012, Pandit 2012, Chloe 2010, Kort 2010, Ariel 2009).

Repairing and Redeeming the World: The Future of Third-Wave Feminism in Law and Religion

So, what are some of the implications of third-wave feminism and third generation human rights for future inquiries into feminism, law, and religion, particularly in light of the still scant reception of third-wave feminism in law and religion and the still marginal status of third generation rights in human rights law? First, the third-wave feminist call for diversity and pluralism of voices and issues will continue to emanate from those working in both law and religion. This commitment to diversity and pluralism has not only academic and theoretical implication in the disciplines of law and religion, but also practical application at the United Nations and other international fora, where feminists from the developing world have been some of the most insistent voices challenging the traditional, liberal, second-wave feminism of Europe, North America, and other developed regions. Recent international conventions on the self-determination of peoples and the rights of indigenous peoples are examples of the trend in international law to attend to the claims and concerns of those in the developing world (UN 2007: Art. 22).

Second, the diversity of issues will continue to extend beyond sexuality and reproduction to third generation rights to peace, prosperity, health, environmental sustainability, and development—all issues that have been acknowledged to affect women disproportionately and differently in various parts of the world. Access to reproductive health, including contraception and abortion, and equality in the family will continue to be significant issues for women’s security and wellbeing, but third generation human rights issues will continue to be increasingly important issues for women’s activism. Sexual and reproductive rights are, ultimately and overall, inextricably linked to women’s self-development and wider human progress, but they will need to be connected and balanced with the more proximate concerns
of women suffering from poverty, famine, disease, war, conflict, environmental degradation, and physical or cultural genocide in many parts of the world.

Third, there will continue to be a pronounced emphasis on both material and cultural dimensions of rights and reform in both law and religion. Women do not live by bread alone, but they may find it helpful to have Smartphones. Third-wave feminism is known for its often playfully subversive means of challenging the culture, as well as the structure of society. The exponential increase of participation in women’s NGOs between Cairo and Beijing as the Internet and teleconferencing were coming into use is a further example of the use of culture and communication to achieve feminist goals—seen recently in the use of social media through Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter in such places as Iran, Egypt, and Syria (Ghimire 2011, Kandy 2011, Khamis 2011, Nemati 2010). Third-wave feminism will continue to access these tools in building a culture of human rights in the third generation.

Fourth, there emerges, both within third-wave feminism and in the lives of their feminist forebears discussed above, a conviction and often a lived reality against perfectionism. Femininity—and sometimes feminism—sits at times uneasily with the circumstances of their lives and the sacrifices that these women made. There are whispers in their autobiographies and activism of the “I’m a feminist, but …” ambivalence expressed by many third-wave feminists today. Their lives feature imperfect romantic alliances, separations from family and caregiving roles, and time spent in jail, under house arrest, or in exile—a far cry from the usual stereotypes of feminine, maternal, and domestic virtue. Their lives were distinctly imperfect, but in a sense that tends to confirm the historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s oft-quoted quip, “Well-behaved women seldom make history” (Ulrich 2007). In a sense, each of these women has been thought of as saint, an icon, or a martyr, but each of them seems to have understood their trials and their callings in the sense of Suu Kyi’s definition of saints as “sinners who go on trying.”

Finally, and related to the points above, both third-wave feminism and third generation rights point to a shift from creation to redemption. No longer are women, in an essentialist way, confined to the parameters of their sexual and reproductive roles, as paramount as these will necessarily remain in the lives of many women. No longer is the achievement of civil and political rights and economic, social, and cultural rights to be left solely to individual nations or governments. There is a recognition that women can do more—and that third generation human rights require more. Today’s women’s human rights activists, increasingly including third-wave feminists, are active on a wide range of human rights issues including climate change, cultural rights, and cyberdemocracy. In a theological sense, they are not limited to the order of creation, but are called to be agents in the repair and redemption of the world. In a similar sense of renewal, third-wave feminism and third generation rights, their breadth and interaction, seem destined to play an
increasingly important role in women’s theory and practice at the intersection of feminism, law, and religion in today’s globalized and interconnected world.\footnote{This article is dedicated to the author’s niece, Sidonie Louise Gillette, a kindergarten peace activist and likely fourth- or fifth-wave feminist.}

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