

Marketisation of Governance:

Critical Feminist Perspectives from the South

Vivienne Taylor

DAWN

(Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era)

2000

Marketisation of Governance

DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) is a feminist network of women activists, researchers and policy makers from the South who are committed to developing alternative frameworks and methods to attain the goals of economic and social justice, peace and development free of all forms of oppression by gender, class, race and nation. Established in 1984, DAWN participants have over the years drawn their analysis from their experiences and research within the women's movement and from the impact of the political economy of change or the dominant development model on the lives of the poorest women in the South.

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Cover note: Women all over the world produce exquisite textiles, skillfully woven or elaborately embellished with beadwork and intricate embroidery. The meagre financial benefits they derive from this work bear little relation to the long hours of labour and high levels of skill, creativity and dedication required. This largely unrecognised art form is also an important repository of cultural, social and religious traditions. The cover of this book shows some examples of weaving, beadwork and embroidery created by unknown, unnamed women in the South.

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DAWN PRST researchers and research papers

AFRICA: (papers presented at DAWN's PRST Africa Region Research Meeting, 29–30 November 1999, Cape Town, South Africa)

Assie-Lumumba, N'Dri T (1999). Political Restructuring and Social Transformation: Social Movements, Women's Movements and the State in Africa.

Collen Seegobin, Lindsey (1999). Globalization, African Re-Colonization, The Nation State, Resistance and Political Creativity.

Diaw, Aminata (1999). Le Pouvoir au Masculin at au Feminin: la production de L'Exclusion.

Hassim, Shireen (1999). Institutionalising Gender: An Examination of State-Led Strategies for Gender Equality.

Mama, Amina (1999). Preliminary thoughts on Gender, Politics and Power in African Contexts.

Meintjes, Sheila (1999) Civil Society and the State: The Changing Nature of Women's Organizations in the 1990s. Pereira, Charmaine (1999). The Institutionalization of Gender in Africa.

Taylor, Vivienne (1999). Cracks in the Edifice: Using the spaces. Unpublished paper presented at DAWN's PRST Africa Region Research Meeting, 29–30 November 1999, Cape Town, South Africa.

LATIN AMERICA: (papers presented at the REPEM and DAWN PRST Latin America Seminar, 22nd–24th October 1999, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Bareiro, Line (1999) State, Women and Politics throughout Latin America History.



Rivera, Marcia (1999) Economy and State in Latin America and the Caribbean in view of growing internationalisation.

Vargas, Virginia (1999) El Feminism y el estado en America Latina.

PACIFIC: (papers prepared for DAWN Meeting, 8–11 October 1999, Chiang Mai, Thailand)

Cox, Elizabeth (1999). Political Restructuring and Social Transformation in the Pacific Region: A Feminist perspective on Papua New Guinea's Crisis in Governance and the Regional Implications.

Fairbairn-Dunlop, Peggy (1999). Institutionalisation of Gender, Political Restructuring and Social Transformation in the Region.

Wichman, Vaine and Tereapii Napa (1999). Globalization, the State and Gender: A Cook Islands Perspective.

Wichman, Vaine (2000). Political Restructuring (Governance) and Social Transformation: Globalisation, The State and Gender: A Small Islands States Perspective. DAWN commissioned paper.

SOUTH ASIA: (papers presented at the DAWN PRST South Asia, South East Asia and Pacific Regions meeting, 8-11 October 1999, Chiang Mai, Thailand)

Abeysekera, Sunila (1999) Social Movements, Feminist Movements and the State: A Regional Perspective.

Agnihotri, Indu (1999) Globalisation and the State: Some reflections on the South Asian Women's Experience.

Kabir, Farah (1999) Institutionalisation of gender in South Asia.

Shaheed, Farida (1999) Politics and Power: A Gendered Perspective from South Asia.

SOUTH EAST ASIA: (papers presented at the DAWN PRST South Asia, South East Asia and Pacific Regions meeting, 8-11 October 1999, Chiang Mai, Thailand)

Medel-Anonuevo, Carolyn (1999) Understanding the Paradox of Globalisation: the Case of South East Asia.



- Ng, Cecilia and Yong, Carol (1999) *Social Movements, Women's Movements and the State in South East Asia: the Politics of Engagement*.
- Pagaduan, Maureen (1999) *Power, Politics and Culture in South East Asia: A preview of contemporary South East Asia*.
- Tiongson, Maria Luz (1999) *Women, the State and the Institutionalisation of Gender Equity*.

INTER-REGIONAL Meeting: (papers prepared for the DAWN PRST Inter-Regional Meeting, 21-23 February 2000, Cape Town, South Africa)

- Assie-Lumumba, N'Dri T (2000). *Political Restructuring and Social Transformation: Synthesis paper of the DAWN's PRST Africa Region*.
- Bareiro, Line (2000). *Political Restructuring and Social transformation - Summary of REPEM & DAWN's PRST Latin America and Caribbean Seminar*.
- Keet, Dot (2000) *The Implications and Challenges of the WTO Regime in Relation to Prospects for Development in the South, Particularly by and for Women*.
- Mukherjee, Vanita Nayak (2000) *Political Restructuring and Social Transformation in South Asia: A Gendered Perspective*.
- Taufeulungaki, Ana Maui (2000) *Political Restructuring and Social Transformation from Gendered Perspectives : A Pacific Synthesis*.
- Additional DAWN PRST research papers:
- Cracks in the Edifice: Critical African Feminist Perspectives on Women and Governance*.
- Report on the Africa regional workshop on PRST, Cape Town, South Africa, 29-30 November 1999*.
- Beyond the Malestream: Feminist Perspectives on Political Restructuring and Social Transformation. Report on the South Asia Regional Workshop on PRST, Bangalore, India, 29-31 August 1998*.
- Signposts to the Summit: Towards WSSD+5 - DAWN Regional Debates on Political Restructuring and Social Transformation, DAWN South Asia, South East Asia and Pacific Workshop Report, Chaing Mai, Thailand, 8-11 October 1999*.



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AFRICA: (29-30 November 1999, Cape Town, South Africa)

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List of Abbreviations

AAWORD	Association of African Women for Research and Development
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ANC	African National Congress
APEC	Asia- Pacific Economic Co-operation
BWI	Bretton Woods Institutions
CAP	Common Agricultural Programme
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGE	Commission for Gender Equality
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DC's	Developed Countries
DSU	Dispute Settlement Understanding
ECLA	Economic Commission of Latin America
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTZ	Free Trade Zones
GAD	Gender and Development
GATS	General Agreement on Trade and Services
GATT	General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HIV	Human Immune Deficiency Virus
IFI	International Financial Institutions



IMF	International Monetary Fund
MAI	Multilateral Agreement on Investment
MIA	Multilateral Investments Agreement
MFA	Multifibre Agreement
MIA	Multilateral Investment Agreement
MNC	Multi-national Corporation
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NPA	National Plan of Action
NAFTA	North America Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NWM	National Women's Machinery
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSW	Office on the Status of Women
PDS	Public Distribution System
PO	People's Organisation
PRST	Political Restructuring and Social Transformation
SADEP	Southern African Development Education and Policy Research Unit
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SEA	South East Asia
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association
TNC	Trans-national Corporation
TRIMS	Trade Related Investment Measures
TRIPS	Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights
TWN	Third World Network
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Family Planning Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund



UR	Uruguay Round
USA	United States of America
WAF	Women's Action Forum
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation
WID	Women in Development
WNC	Women's National Coalition
WSSD	World Summit on Social Development
WTO	World Trade Organisation
VAW	Violence Against Women



DAWN Steering Committee members

The DAWN Steering Committee provided guidance to this project. Its members are:

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Chapter 1

Marketisation of governance

“The transition to democracy is a narrative of the exclusion of women. What is needed is a new geography to give women space. This new space which women seek is one where there is negotiation between those with power and those without.”¹

Introduction

Political Restructuring and Social Transformation (PRST) was adopted as DAWN’s focus for research in 1996. DAWN’s ongoing work on alternative development frameworks² and the global political economy pointed to the multiple impacts of the changing economic order on the state and its capacity to govern. We began our regional and global research and analysis on PRST after intense and rigorous debates leading up to and after the World Conference on Women in Beijing and the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen. We noted the trends after the collapse of the eastern bloc: the changed political landscape, the rise in various forms of fundamentalism, the discrediting of state-led development and the ascendancy of neo liberal economics.³ Our engagements with women at the global and national levels revealed the contradictions and fractures within the global institutions and the ways in which these affected our countries and regions.

Claiming our footprints

We were challenged to examine how we engaged within the United Nations and other global systems of governance. Moreover we began to reflect



on the gains achieved through the UN conferences and the extent to which these gains made a difference to the lives of poor women.

Our analysis on these and other related issues pointed to the gains that had been achieved through engagement and strategic advocacy. Especially gains that were made through women's movements at Beijing and at Copenhagen on the location of women's rights as human rights and the international guarantees according to which we could hold our governments accountable. DAWN's analysis showed that these gains were being lost because they were not being translated into real change at the local level. Attempts to review how national processes of political restructuring and social transformation were taking place and the extent to which national governments, regional and global institutions of governance were responding to the commitments made to advance women's equality were essential (the ten commitments are reflected in Box 1). How can these gains, these paper guarantees, be translated into real change, a change at the level of social relations?

Among the ground-breaking agreements made by the world's leaders in the Declaration are ten commitments to:*

- *eradicate absolute poverty by a target date to be set by each country;*
- *support full employment as a basic policy goal;*
- *promote social integration based on the enhancement and protection of all human rights;*
- *achieve equality and equity between women and men;*
- *accelerate the development of Africa and the least developed countries;*
- *ensure that structural adjustment programmes include social development goals;*
- *increase resources allocated to social development;*
- *create "an economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development";*
- *attain universal and equitable access to education and primary health care; and*
- *strengthen cooperation for social development through the UN.*

Source: *World Summit for Social Development, The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, 6–12 March 1995, United Nations.*



The path we had travelled “had no road maps and few markers to guide us”²⁴ as we began to deepen our analysis on the links between regional, national and global processes of governance and how these shaped the lived experiences of poor women from the South. We were mindful of the “dual nature of our engagement”. We had to locate ourselves as a relevant force in the different forums and spaces at global, regional and national levels, and at the same time, maintain a critical distance to ensure that in using global space our struggle for gender justice did not become weakened.

So we began to interrogate our approach and our own strategic objectives within DAWN. Were we really looking at how to engage within a global space that expanded the framework for the attainment of rights of those people who were previously excluded? To what extent were we legitimating existing inequalities and power relations by engaging with global institutions of governance? Would engagement lead to change from within or would it perpetuate the status quo and marginalisation of women, particularly poor women? These questions informed our decision to ground our research and analysis within regions of the South to better analyse how global governance, and especially agreements made in the boardrooms of the World Trade Organisation, affected the legitimacy of the nation state.

Contested terrain

DAWN realised that it would be straddling a difficult path; that of entering contested space (within some global institutions) to ensure that feminist perspectives on democracy, citizenship, nationality, the nature of the state, global governance, globalisation, and gender justice were heard and considered in these forums. While new spaces were opening up for critical engagement we had to ensure also that our engagement did not diffuse our objectives as a feminist network from the South or lead to co-option.

We asked ourselves whether changes at the global level actually resulted in fundamental social transformation at the level where it counts, in terms of social relations, in terms of relations between men and women, rich and poor and in terms of relations at other levels of society?



The research process

As a feminist network of the South we engaged in the research process to strengthen our capacity to engage at national, regional and global levels by recasting the analytical frameworks that influence political restructuring. In doing this DAWN sought also to constantly reflect on and review through a collective process the experiences of feminists from the south as articulated by them.

The research process brought together the perspectives of women researchers, activists, and feminists from Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Island states, South and South East Asia in a process of critical debate and collective analysis. In our research and analysis we sought to reframe the debates on governance and politics from a feminist perspective and to articulate a vision of genuine political restructuring to achieve social transformation.

Framing the discourse on governance

We realised that we had to interrogate both the mainstream discourse on governance as well as the underlying reasons for the way in which this discourse is constructed and promoted. In doing this we hoped to expose the contradictions and the flawed assumptions in a system that is eroding the state's capacity to deliver social needs. DAWN debated the emerging framework that was used to guide research and analysis within regions and through interregional processes. During the process we began to challenge mainstream governance and political reform ideas that are antagonistic to human development.

In order to change the discourse on governance we examined both state and non-state processes – so that through our analysis we would present a view of governance and of political and social transformation that would be different from the mainstream or malestream debates. Mainstream debates on these aspects are male-dominated and conventional in their approach and thinking and serve to reinforce women's sub-ordination in structures of power.

The evolving framework

Across the development decades links have been made between the need for social development and growth. Indeed, economic development has



also been seen by some theorists to have the potential to increase social mobilisation and the demand for political participation. The tendency to fast track Western-style political liberalism on the back of economic liberalism remains a persistent feature.

The type of transitions that many countries are experiencing raise issues of concern that go beyond whether political restructuring should precede economic reform and development. These issues relate to whether national states are able to create an enabling political environment to promote human rights as well as the participation of women and the institutionalisation of gender in ways that would result in equity and social justice.

Against this backdrop, this period of globalisation has given rise to certain dilemmas that states and civil society organisations are grappling with. The first is the growth dilemma. There is a need for economic growth but an inability to live with the consequences of the exploitation and dependency created through national and international market forces in promoting growth that is jobless and unsustainable.

Secondly there is the control dilemma. We need to guide technological innovation but we shun centralised control. On the one hand, there is recognition that certain fundamental changes such as the redistribution of power and resources will not occur because of the divisions within our society. At the same time the control and regulation of social and economic resources is becoming more and more centralised through global networks, institutions and mechanisms. The sovereignty of nations is being affected. There is no adequate or appropriate value system and philosophy within the market system for the redistribution of resources or wealth to those who are in need.

Finally we are confronted by the work role dilemma. Our societies are increasingly unable to supply an adequate number of meaningful work roles for people. The division of labour within the household and society also has an impact on production and reproduction.

These dilemmas are part of the crisis that confronts us. In order to promote social development in this context we have to adopt strategies



that can challenge the structures, systems and processes that reinforce under-development and poverty. This requires a rigorous programme of policy and institutional change. Policy and institutional changes need to be considered at the level of national governments and at the level of international governance.

The democratic imperative

Our discussions pointed to the need for an understanding of governance within a global context that predetermines international relations alongside the increasing interdependence of national economies. We analysed the importance and significance of various types of states-from plural democracies to authoritarian systems. The need for democratic renewal and social transformation was a common concern in the process. Feminists asserted the importance of developing a participatory democracy that would promote the possibility of full social citizenship and integration for the excluded.

We also began to reframe traditional constructs such as states, issues of sovereignty, of political identity, of security through feminist lenses. We asked ourselves what these terms mean and how they emerge in everyday processes of decision-making. Moreover we realised that our shared experiences in the shifting, contested terrain of governance and political power had certain commonalities. Does this shifting terrain with diverse actors actually lead to us changing our strategic objectives? Or do we use that terrain to consolidate what we want to achieve? How do we mobilise different forms of power on multiple fronts to expand the space for and attainment of gender justice? Feminists from the South examined both state and non-state processes that shape political and social processes in the arena of governance. Chapter two of this book responds to some of these questions and provides a critical analysis of the state, politics and state power and how these constructs result in different realities and institutional formations.

Our ongoing analysis reconfirmed our view that countries in the South are experiencing recurrent crises that have their roots in both historical



factors as well as contemporary crises of governance that call into question the legitimacy of the state. The impact of these crises challenge us to examine the political and economic compacts of power that are being made both in the north and south through international institutions and governance mechanisms at global, regional and national levels. There are multiple and varied impacts on women. For these and other reasons it was necessary to examine the objectives of states in relation to women and what the notion and practice of citizenship means in the context of the persistent denial of rights to women.

The efficiency imperative

The global political economy, the continuance of neo liberal macro economic policies and the rise of fundamentalism and other forms of patriarchal backlash which emerge in the context of “identity politics” also made us question the rhetoric of good governance and political restructuring. Global governance and efficient management have become the new mantras of international agencies and institutions at the same time as the power of states and the capacity of states to govern is being reorganised and redirected away from public interests to secure conditions for private interests.

Chapter three provides a rigorous analysis of the impact of this phase of globalisation on the state and on women. An overriding feature of our analysis on the state and international economic governance is the marketisation of state functions. This is not only with regard to the selling off of state assets but also with core policy and legislative functions being outsourced or contracted out to private, usually foreign, consultants. In the context of this marketisation of governance what does democracy and participation mean for those who have and are outside the centres of power.

The market needs the protection of the state to promote its economic policies. The flip side is that quasi-state organisations such as the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF are providing a “one policy” fit for countries in the South. This includes the privatisation of essential services and utilities. Together with increasing levels of poverty and jobless growth, essen-



tial services are outside the reach of the poorest citizens. The burden of care is pushing those on the margins into the most degrading and hazardous forms of survival. This inevitably leads to further fragmentation and deepening conflict. The international debate on governance has been reduced to what kind of government is needed for the global market. The emphasis is on efficiency and engagement with the market forces in a competitive environment. Government's attention has been diverted from providing for its citizens to how to secure foreign investment and markets. In the ensuing race to open markets and promote free trade countries in the south lag far behind.

These dynamics prompted DAWN to seek political alternatives that would reverse the marginalisation of women. In chapter four feminists interrogate the relationship between state and non-state processes. This is done against the backdrop of gender equity and the extent to which governments and the full range of institutions in society have incorporated the objectives of social transformation and gender justice into policies and practices. The marginalisation, deepening poverty and different forms of violence experienced by women in the south reinforced the need for political alternatives in chapter 4. Despite some shifts post the UN conferences, the pervasive nature of colonialism, patriarchy, ethnocism, racism, sexism, fundamentalism and narrow nationalism continue to have a devastating impact on poor women. These factors are mediated through both government and transnational corporations in culturally determined ways.

The crisis of distribution

The extent to which mainstream debates on governance have co-opted the language of transformation is arguable. Indeed, a disturbing trend is the homogenisation of the concept of good governance without a critique of the impact it has on the lives of women. In this way dominant forces project an image of uniformity and common purpose when this is not the case. Central to our evolving debates was the concern with how governments, political and economic elites capture state power to retain the status quo



and their own vested interests. We began to examine the political and social spheres as a shifting terrain within which the many competing claims to various forms of power and resources create compacts and trade-offs that result in further fragmentation and patterns of exclusion. Given the sites of contestation and women's location within them it was also important to analyse the type of social and cultural relations that are outcomes of the political economy and the inequalities that women experience at both personal and social levels.

We challenged the thinking that political changes underway within national and regional contexts could lead to social transformation that would shift the balance of power and forces in favour of women and those who have been excluded from society. Women's experiences and discourse revealed that transformation and human development is not necessarily an objective of the state. Chapter five provides an analysis of the feminist movement, social movements and the state. Key issues related to the distribution of power, resources and the ongoing dilemma of working with and outside of the state are raised.

Throughout our research we linked the process of political restructuring, not only to a deeper understanding of the nature of the state and its instruments, but also to the need for the transformation of relations and processes within and between governments, business and civil society organisations. We tried to make sense of our societies, and the post-modern context, in which the dynamic changes take place at an unsurpassed rate. This made us question orthodox modes of analysis that no longer provide us with useful analytical tools to make sense of what is happening as we leapfrog into the 21st Century.

DAWN's commitment to seek alternatives that serve the interests of those who have been excluded both economically and politically, particularly women was strengthened during this project. Implicit in the conceptual framework on political restructuring is our recognition that economic and political processes are inter-related and that economic power and political power are mutually reinforcing. Further more, while the sites of struggle



and actors may differ, the compacts, negotiations and confrontations that take place at various historical moments contribute to women's multiple experiences of gender oppression at the house hold, community, regional, national and international levels.

Conclusion

The experiences and analysis of feminists in the South confirmed our views that global economic institutions, informed by neo-liberal policies, have unleashed multiple forces and processes in the social, economic and political spheres that have far reaching implications for women.⁵ In the chapters that follow the narrative of the marginalisation and exclusion of women is played out in unabated violence, increased militarisation of states, more fragmentation than ever before, persistent poverty and growing inequalities. Even as we are told that the international system is determined to address these aspects at the United Nations review of the World Summit on Social Development, women's experiences reveal the gaps between the rhetoric and reality.

Notes

- 1 Aminata Diaw, 1999, in her presentation at the DAWN Africa PRST Research meeting in Cape Town.
- 2 Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives written by Gita Sen and Caren Grown clearly voiced the concerns and views of poor women. Challenging the Given – prepared for the WSSD and Markers on the Way: the DAWN Debates on Alternative Development, by Gita Sen highlighted the complexities of the global political economy and the need to review institutions of global governance.
- 3 Claire Slatter, 1999. Signposts to the Summit: Towards WSSD+5
- 4 Gita Sen, 1995:4 Markers on the Way
- 5 Mukerjee, 1998



Chapter 2

Feminists recasting politics and power

“We commit ourselves to promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.”¹

Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the state and state-power. It also highlights the views on the state, power and politics of women in the South. Women’s participation in mainstream political activity as well as in the broader arena of governance is also reviewed. Post Beijing and the Copenhagen Declaration, states committed themselves to address poverty, social integration, capacity and governance. Since then little has changed. The global political landscape has been recast. The break-up of the Eastern block and the push for multiparty liberal democracies has changed the balance of power everywhere. We are therefore, as women, challenged to interrogate whether the objectives of the many struggles for national liberation, as well as women’s emancipation are being attained. Women across the South question to what extent political liberation from repressive regimes has led to an improvement in the overall quality of life of the poorest. There is a new urgency to understand and interrogate the politics of



governance and changes under way in national, regional and global contexts from a critical feminist perspective.

It is evident from much of the mainstream or malestream debate on the nature of political changes and processes of governance that the dominant discourse does not include perspectives and concerns of poor people, nor of women. The debates tend to focus on the state machinery, the crisis of the state or the capacity of states to manage within a global context of accelerated change. Although public interest perspectives of the state have dominated contemporary discourse, these perspectives tend to create a false sense of homogeneity in relation to the state as characterised by patriarchy and neo-colonial factors. Further, it is just as clear that social transformation, as much as it has become the mantra of governments and perspectives on the left, is not understood in the same way and is not necessarily an objective of political change or democratic renewal.

It is therefore necessary to understand what issues of governance and state restructuring within a changing global context mean for the disenfranchised, the socially and economically excluded. In this chapter feminists from the South provide a critical analysis of some of the key issues that characterize state power and politics.

Mainstream critiques of the state

The need for institutional reform of the state is emerging from both a neo-liberal and a left critique for different reasons. Both sides of the critique focus on the state's role in the market. The market and the NGO sectors are seen, by the right, as alternatives to lead economic development. Development direction is driven by emphasis on market efficiency at the cost of distribution of resources. While both critiques focus on the unresponsiveness of bureaucracy to people's views and needs and the growing inequalities within and between countries, the reasons attributed for this differ. There is a convergence of critiques even though the objectives of the right and the left differ; the right may be said to be co-opting left critique for its own

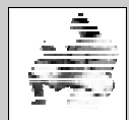


agenda. Neo-liberal proponents see the market as the best allocator of goods and services, and the left perceive the state to be alienated from people, corrupt, promoting a new elite with vested interests in maintaining the status quo. A major critique of the current debates on the state and governance from the feminist perspective is that the discourse lacks a historical analysis. It therefore does not reflect patterns of powerlessness nor does it reflect the manner in which traditional cultures and colonial cultures combine through state and economic institutions to exploit women. Even when a historical context is used by theorists on the left the state is examined from the perspective of class and race and the position of women is ignored.

This, of course, raises further issues in our analyses of the state, that of how patterns of patriarchy are embedded in its institutions and derive from traditional cultural forms, but are not exclusive to these. The result is an explicit or implicit compact of male power that permeates every sphere of women's lives and has given rise to what some feminists call the "masculinity of the state". The construction of a masculine society and state has a significant impact on the type of space for women's engagement. There are stark contradictions emerging. It has on the one hand, resulted in the push for liberal democracy and protection of individual rights within the notion of citizenship and nationhood and, on the other hand, countries continue to deny rights to women within the public and private sphere.

Whatever the critique, the state is seen as the arbiter of democracy and therefore its role in public policy and action cannot be abolished. Neither can it be left to the NGO sector (as if this is an independent sector), nor can it be left to what is glibly seen as a unified homogenous civil society sector. However, even more significant, the 1990s is characterised by concern with growth through the market, the erosion of state's capacity while at the same time development directions are discussed in terms of governance and efficient management. The debate has shifted from issues of distribution to efficiency and management.

Whatever differences and limitations models of democratic transitions contain, they all have in common the absence of some categories of actors,



the most noticeable being constituted by women. Yet the semblance of democracy is being still presented as a source of potential positive change.²

Related to, democracy is the concept of governance and how it has been promoted with its policy implications. The definition of good governance is a controversial issue for feminists from the South. Ideally, governance is “a set of rules institutions, and values that are used to manage state and society”.³ Governance institutions include political parties, parliaments, government and their interaction with society. Although governance is philosophically universal, governance values, types of government, the nature of political parties, whose interests are protected, and the power that the masses have to challenge the state or offer alternative ways of handling public affairs, vary.⁴ The liberal definition of democracy is more concerned with reason, law and freedom of choice but overlooks the position of different social categories in the social space where power is located.⁵ Evidently, this definition ignores the fundamental premises upon which democracy is based.

This conception of democracy does not take into account the historical contingencies that have limited women’s chances to exercise their freedom. To the contrary, in the case of Africa, political organisations, prior to colonialism, were characterised by “existence of democratic rule even among people governed by monarchic rules in highly pyramidal political structures”.⁶ Political organisations were also characterised by gender balance in policy formulation and implementation as well as women’s participation in the political process. Historical and cultural analysis of African societies reveal evidence of a wide range of democratic systems, practice and culture that reflect long-term political processes in which people were involved. Feminists in Africa assert that democracy was not reduced to “rituals of simplistic, mechanistic, legalistic, and occasional exercises of individuals”.⁷

The state and state power

Notions of democracy, governance, and the state are used as constructs without actually interrogating how these constructs result from both historical factors and experiences. Further the patriarchal characteristics of the state and state-led development processes are seldom analysed.



States have been considered the most important kind of political organisation in the global system. The power of states is an important feature in political restructuring and social transformation. Illustrative of this power are three common definitions:

The first is that of state power seen as control over resources, over actors and over outcomes. Distinctions are made between what the state possesses and what the state is able to do. Secondly, mainstream debates on politics are located within a masculine construct of the state and the state's power: "When we speak of power, we mean man's (sic) control over the minds and action of other men."⁸ Thirdly, power as embodied in resources that a state possesses; put simply, the state holds the key to economic development, social security, individual liberty, and life and death over people.

The complex relationship between state control over resources and its ability to change or modify the behaviour of others or to control outcomes in international disputes is not easy to understand since many other dynamics influence states. There are internal factors that are not explicit but that emerge at certain points in the history of development within the nation state and complex external forces. Emerging trends show that:

- Each region in the South is experiencing crises that have their origins in history and are manifested as a contemporary crisis of governance. These crises encompass the Asian economic crisis, internal conflicts, "ethnic", race-based and religious conflicts. They impact on the lives of women with devastating consequences.
- In all regions of the South, political and economic compacts of power are made through international institutions at the global, regional and national level. These compacts are mediated both through forces, economic and social power and new information technology.
- In the new emerging political economy of change, states and global institutions have overt and covert objectives. At the overt level, decision making is dominated by mainstream institutions and promoted through the industrial North.
- Global governance and efficient management are the new mantras of international agencies and institutions.



- Change takes place so fast it creates a dynamic that leaves behind whole communities, areas and regions.
- At the same time as countries of the South are asked to engage in liberalizing their economies we also find that institutions that set the terms are not transparent, democratized or open, nor do they open themselves up to the participation of the majority of the poor.
- The reassertion of neo-liberalism is accompanied by an increase in fundamentalism.
- There is collective amnesia about the impacts of colonialism, racism, sexism, fundamentalism and narrow nationalism.
- In the contested and shifting sites of struggle, there has been homogenization of debates on governance and political transformation.
- Women across the regions of the South are beginning to ask questions about the meaning of democracy and citizenship.
- Women of the South are challenging the way the public-private dichotomy is constructed.

Constructs, such as state sovereignty, political identity and security when viewed through feminist's lenses, reflect patterns of power, control and exploitation over women and poor people. Against the backdrops of historical, cultural, economic and political forces women in the South are beginning to claim spaces to contest the shifting terrain of politics and governance. The search for real political alternatives, to challenge notions promoted by proponents of liberal pluralism, and economic fundamentalism is beginning to gain momentum.

Across regions of the South women challenge the notion of the state as a static entity because within this perspective is the assumption that states and state led processes are inviolate. The state as a monolithic organisation that cannot be pressurised to change from within, poses limits to our engagement. This tendency has immobilized and alienated women from the state and its power. Significantly, feminists in the South are beginning to see the state as a contested terrain and are refusing to leave the state and the state machinery unchecked.



Neither should we view the state as the withering instrument of the ruling class, as orthodox Marxists would like us to believe. Our experiences in the South show that the state is neither. It is an actor in its own right. While the state may be seen to act independently, its unity or coherence should not be exaggerated. Feminists in the South are beginning to grapple with this.

The state and its organisational entities experience and represent the same social forces as other social organisations. States and state elites, in attempting to appear united for whatever reason, mask the actual disunity of political power. Political power in itself is not a unified homogeneous power that cannot be dismantled and grappled with. Unified political power is usually brought about through control and coercion: in very militarised states, through the power of force; in authoritarian systems, through a lack of civil liberties, etc. and in liberal democracies through economic and social compacts with elites.

A very real compact of power exists between state-led institutions and transnational corporations. Feminist analyses in the South, point to the reality that instead of states acting in the interests of its citizens who have elected them into power, states are actually acting in the interests of private enterprises.

A noticeable shift has occurred from parliamentary democracy and the public interest role of the state through to the shifts in how to secure faster gains for the private sector to promote economic growth. States, in this context can no longer be analysed as fixed ideological entities. Rather, they embody an ongoing dynamic, a changing set of aims, as they engage with and disengage from other social and economic forces.

State power

State power and the dynamics through which power plays itself out are difficult to define and understand, but there is a new urgency for us to reframe and interrogate traditional constructs such as states, sovereignty, political identity and security through feminist lenses.



The emerging political economy of change

What is relevant in this period, as nation states begin to engage within a globalised system, is that states have a two-faced, a Janus nature. They stand at the intersection between domestic, sociopolitical order and transnational relations. In the past states looked at their comparative advantage in relation to their internal strengths and how these could be used to maximize opportunities in the global trading system. Today the issues in the globalised system have moved beyond that to how to carve out markets using a competitive edge: competitive edge – simply put – usually relates to the ability of industry to produce goods and services at the lowest labour and other costs thereby undercutting goods produced at higher costs.

There is a real compact power, explicit or implied between economic and political elites. Instead of governments acting in the interests of all its citizens, the interests of private enterprise and transnational corporations have been prioritised on the assumption that this would be in the interests of national development. The shifts from democratic engagement on what is in the interest of public to how to secure faster gains for the private sector and capital to promote investment and foreign exchange earnings have often resulted in few or no internal checks and balances to safeguard the interests of the poorest.

Although countries differ in the range of factors that shape their development paths common elements include historical factors, patriarchal forces and various forms of oppression. In all regions in the South women have voiced their consensus about the characteristics of states within the global system.

Firstly, analysis of states suggest that regions consist of “state-nations” rather than nation-states”, where the corporate power of the state dominates. This is instead of people being integrated into a nation-state as active citizens.

Secondly, the common experience voiced by women in all regions is the States’ inability to provide benefits and services that were fought for through the many independence and post independence struggles.

Thirdly, the focus of states on the primacy of economic growth rather than on people centered equitable development has increased inequalities and alienation.



Fourthly, regions in the South, particularly in Asia and Africa have witnessed the growing legitimacy of identity politics (in its ethnic, race and religious variations.)

Fifthly, in all regions there is increasing repression and antagonism to civil society organisations, resulting in their depoliticisation.

Sixthly, globalisation is undermining the sovereignty of states and reorganising them into economic territories, regions or markets.

Historical influences in state power and citizenship

Historical factors have influenced the power dynamics within the contemporary nation-state and have created the conditions for a differentiated and privileged citizenship.

State power and citizenship

Differentiated citizenship: Women's experiences in the South indicate that from its inception and until several decades into the 20th century the nation state conferred citizenship status and rights to men: Sex, race, class, age, ethnicity, and religion were and still are a basis for differentiation. The attainment of full social citizenship has been denied women in many parts of the South. This differentiated application of citizenship rights affect the ways in which women can participate in society.

Women have engaged with the state to secure full citizenship. Their struggles spill over from attempts to change power relationships in family life and society, to how to gain power in the public arena to exert sufficient influence on it to transform the process.

Based on Brazilian experience, women in Latin America⁹ insist on the need to incorporate the racial dimension and other inequalities whenever the process of women and society is being dealt with. For example, we need to reflect that women's incorporation into the labour market during the forties applied to poor white women in Latin America and not to black women.

- *The family as a legitimate sub-state entity:* The basic premise of the nation state is that it provides for a direct and exclusive relationship with citi-



zens, with the exception of the family where the state delegates authority to persons outside state structures (males and in particular male heads of households). The special status of the family as a nuclear entity, is still upheld by Constitutions of contemporary states and in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The reality in regions of the South bears little resemblance to this conception of family. A consequence is that while the state reserves the monopoly of instruments of coercion, it turns a blind eye to domestic violence, and while women are granted formal equality by virtually all constitutions, they are denied such equality in the family and this is reinforced through personal laws.

- *Multiplestate-citizenship mediation:* The state-citizenship relationship has never been entirely practicable. Different institutions continue to mediate between the state and citizens, particularly in postcolonial states. Pre-colonial institutions were not integrated or replaced into the “modern” contemporary state through locally driven processes, but were integrated into contemporary society as the means to divide, subordinate and restrict autonomous forms of power.

Local power structures and elites continued to play an active role between the people and the “distant” state during colonial rule. Today they continue to operate in post-independent states and have appropriated modern state machinery on a large scale to maintain unequal power relations.

Further in some regions, reform religious movements emerged in the context of the colonial state and because of state repression, there was little internal confrontation between “modern” and religious forces. Religious domination in its worst forms have led to the denial of women’s human rights in many countries of the South.

The political terrain as a shifting site of struggle

Pre-independence struggles in the South

Critical feminist analysis points to the manner in which history has denied or failed to recognise the role of women in pre-independence national lib-



eration struggle. This lack of recognition of women's involvement in the political terrain has resulted in the conventional thinking that women are not "political beings" and are more comfortable in the domestic arena.

Women's early involvement in struggles for political and civil rights was also linked to nationalist movements in alliance with males against the "alien other". For many, part of the struggle was the need to gain access to education and employment opportunities. Many women, especially those who engage with the "grassroots",¹⁰ reflect on the sense of alienation and disenchantment they feel about the betrayal of the goals of revolutionary struggles.

Post-independence and contemporary

Women's involvement in nationalist struggles however changed their lives and even while they were denied opportunities to shape the new states they gained de jure rights. Gender relations were not reshaped. Subordination of and discrimination against women has been a persistent feature of women's engagement in state activities. They have not been able to access de jure rights in many cases because interpretation of these rights is male determined.

Absence of democratic practice

In many countries of the South, women state that state power and politics has little to do with democracy and development. Patronage across ideological divides and authoritarian/military rule, prevail instead of legitimacy and accountability. A democratic ethos has not emerged and politics has been reduced to an electoral process without accountability

Some paradoxes of women's participation in political structures

Women's struggle for political space has resulted in some gains. A few women have attained positions, as heads of state, leaders of opposition and members of parliament (see table overleaf).

A feature of women's take up of key political positions in countries in Asia has been the political power wielded by family dynasties or as is called in Sri Lanka the "Over his dead body syndrome". However, women enter-



ing political spaces through patronage and patriarchal structures are unlikely to challenge the structures that brought them to power and to cham-

Table 2.1: Women in political life (1995)

A = % parliamentary seats occupied by women; B = % governmental posts occupied by women, ministerial level; C = % governmental posts occupied by women, total

	A	B	C		A	B	C
Angola		7.4	6.2	Lesotho	11.2	6.7	13.8
Antigua	0.0	30.0		Madagascar		0.0	0.0
Argentina	0.0	3.2		Malawi	5.6	4.5	6.1
Bahrain	0.0	0.0		Malaysia	11.1	7.7	5.8
Bangladesh	10.6	4.5	3.4	Maldives	6.3	5.3	10.1
Bhutan		12.5	5.0	Mauritania	0.0	3.6	4.7
Bolivia	9.6	0.0	9.4	Mauritius	2.9	4.0	7.4
Botswana	10.0	0.0	10.9	Mexico	13.9	14.3	6.7
Brazil	7.1	3.6	13.1	Mozambique	25.2	3.6	13.2
Burundi	12.3	7.7	4.3	Myanmar/Burma		0.0	0.0
Cambodia		0.0	5.1	Namibia	18.1	9.5	6.6
Cameroon	12.2	2.7	5.4	Nepal		0.0	0.0
Cape Verde	7.6	12.5	11.5	Nicaragua		10.5	10.5
Central African Rep.	3.5	5.3	4.9	Nigeria	2.0	3.7	4.1
Chile	7.2	15.8	12.2	Pakistan	1.6	3.7	1.6
Colombia	9.3	10.5	24.7	Papua New Guinea	0.0	0.0	1.6
Congo	1.6	6.3	4.3	Paraguay	5.6	0.0	3.3
Costa Rica	14.0	14.8	20.8	Peru	10.0	5.6	9.7
Cuba	22.8	3.6	8.4	Philippines	9.5	8.3	23.9
Ecuador	4.5	6.7	9.8	Samoa		6.7	7.1
El Salvador	10.7	5.9	18.4	Senegal		3.6	2.3
Fiji	5.8	8.7	9.8	Seychelles		30.8	21.3
Gabon		3.2	6.0	Singapore	3.7	0.0	5.1
Gambia	7.8	22.2	6.7	Solomon Is.	2.1	0.0	0.0
Ghana	8.0	10.7	10.5	South Africa	23.7	9.4	7.0
Guyana	20.0	11.1	16.2	Sri Lanka	5.3	12.5	8.7
Haiti	3.0	17.4	13.8	Suriname	5.9	0.0	13.6
Honduras	7.0	10.5	17.0	Tanzania	10.6	15.6	9.1
India	8.0	4.2	6.1	Thailand	4.8	3.8	4.4
Indonesia	12.2	3.6	1.8	Trinidad & Tobago	20.6	20.0	13.6
Jamaica	5.6	13.4		Uganda		12.5	9.8
Korea Dem. Rep.		1.2	0.8	Uruguay	7.0	0.0	2.9
Korea Republic	2.0	3.4	1.5	Zaire	5.0	3.4	1.7
Laos		0.0	2.7	Zimbabwe	14.7	3.0	10.8

Source: *The World Guide 1997/98: A View from the South*, Instituto del Tercer Mundo. Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd.

pion women’s cause (this applies equally to high political positions and trade unions for example).

Lack of opportunities and resources

Women were never part of traditional local power structures nor have they made entry into industrialist/traders class. Thus they have little opportunities for public influence and to enter politics. Women also lack opportunities to move within the hierarchies without patronage of male leaders. Even the women’s wings of political parties, when they exist, may further marginalise women



rather than integrate them into central power structures. Women do not have necessary resources to enter and compete in contemporary political arena – even middle class males cannot access these.

Women claim that contrary to development theory, improved social indicators do not automatically open the doors of power and improve participation and representation (as exemplified by Sri Lanka where indicators for health, education and participation in the labour force are high). Development interventions also often have narrow perspectives; even interventions that may have had positive outcomes for some women in terms of economic empowerment have neither translated into collective gains nor into sustained political power.¹¹

Scope for women's public activism varies across class, region and country but power is curtailed to all. Patriarchal control continues to limit women's agency and mobility which block access to health, education, employment and politics.

Women's participation in politics

Using formal channels, women have been able to enter and contest elections. However, the percentage of women in positions in legislatures and the bureaucracy remain low. The most important collective impact is that women have articulated women's issues and placed them on the agendas of state institutions, political parties and development projects, and ensured inclusion in policy documents – this has been achieved with collaboration of allies in both state structures (often women) and NGO's.

Feminist perspectives from South Asia on politics and power¹²

The Beijing process and negotiations on women's rights catalysed work between women activists and governments, and resulted in strengthening mechanisms to implement National Plans of Action.

Affirmative action and reservation seats

Affirmative action in the political sphere has become a demand and with the exception of Nepal all states have initiated it at local level. Other measures



include reservation of seats or quotas for candidacy. These have had some positive features such as ensuring the physical presence of women and the placing of women's issues on the agenda. But there have also been negative outcomes.

In Pakistan for example, women are elected by indirect election, and used as tokens by political parties to increase their share in the assembly. In Pakistan and Bangladesh women are discouraged from contesting open seats and political parties deny them the opportunity to contest general seats (reserved for males). Reserved seats also undermine opportunities for training and gaining experience.

The most impressive affirmative action has been India, where 33% of local government seats are reserved for women. Some are "proxy candidates" (relatives of male politicians), and some women, especially those from lower castes have experienced violence. However more than a million women are in power, are active participants and adhere to the idea and practice of representative democracy. The effectiveness of this depends on the local configuration of power and cultural environment.

In contesting political space, women face many problems. These include poverty, illiteracy, lack of economic resources, disabling social and legal environments, family and household pressures, male dominated bureaucracy and politicians.

Using informal channels

South Asia attests to the difficulties of socioeconomic gains being translated into women's ability to access political power. Feminists are concerned that development initiatives such as the Grameen Bank, SEWA and BRAC have not led to sustained political power. Women have also been able to mobilise informally. An example of this is anti-liquor campaigns in three states in India started by poor Dalit agricultural women labourers. They focused on the violence perpetrated by drunken males and were able to stop liquor sales. But due to strongarm tactics by the police and administration the gains were limited.



Understanding local power dynamics

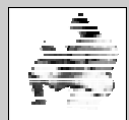
“In each state the specific configuration and dynamics of power sets the parameters within which change can be instituted. To access power at any level, women need to first understand how power and influence operate in that environment - be it the family or the state - and then to identify the most effective channels and vehicles available to them.”¹³

Counteracting identity politics – the role of civil society

Women in South Asia (and Africa) voiced concerns about the rise of identity politics. The rise of identity politics may provide space to individual women but it is a challenge to women’s collective access to power. As violence increases, minorities organise for self-protection and majorities organise around aggressive exclusivist actions and policies. Militant politico-religious parties, with undemocratic and misogynist agendas, who lack popular support, have become alarmingly influential (e.g.: Pakistan, Bangladesh) due to concessions made to them by the more popular “non-religious defined” parties. Even in the context of a secular framework (e.g. India) communal (religious) violence and the success of the dominant BJP are of concern.

Identity politics in South Asia

Essentialist politics ascendant in the region may provide individual women increased personal space and more power but pose a major challenge to women’s collective access to power. Moreover the nature of essentialist politics is that it feeds on itself so that the rise of identity politics and the increasing acceptance of violence in the pursuit of such agendas has immediate implications for neighbouring states and people. Events in one country, themselves frequently linked internationally, have ramifications across South Asian borders e.g. the destruction of the Babri masjid in India provoked senseless violence against buildings identified as Hindu even when the people affected were in fact Muslims. Events in one part of the country that pit or appear to pit one “collective” against another will reverberate elsewhere commonly catalysing similar or retaliatory actions and sentiments. This pushes minority communities into organising for self-



protection – often resulting in a ghetto mentality - and majority communities into aggressive exclusivist actions and policies.

Sri Lanka has been embroiled in a civil war for decades in which both ethnic and religious identities have divided the populace into ever more isolated and watertight segments. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, increasingly militant politico-religious parties who present their undemocratic and misogynistic political agendas in a religious idiom, have grown spectacularly. And, in some ways, they have overcome their lack of popular support thanks to the constant concessions made to their demands and pressures by the more popular “non-religiously defined” political parties and sitting governments. (Rashid 96) Whereas politico-religious parties have never enjoyed direct power and have consistently been routed at the polls, the level of indirect influence exercised by such groups has grown to a point that is alarming.

If, in Pakistan, the prominent place of religious identity in the state’s creation helped legitimise the frequent and facile recourse made to religion by diverse political actors in pursuit of political power, this is not the case for India that has maintained a secular framework. It is all the more disconcerting, therefore, that a secular framework and a fairly regular electoral process have failed to prevent the rise of communal violence first between Hindus and Muslims and now in violence targeting Christians. Of even greater concern has been the consecutive electoral success of the BJP. These tendencies penetrate various state institutions as well, most importantly the courts and law-enforcing agencies.¹⁴

Feminists point to 3 factors that may contribute to the resurgence of primordial religious and ethnic identity politics in South Asia:

- *Firstly*, localised forms of governance that were neither replaced nor integrated into the modern state apparatus.
- *Secondly*, economic policies that distribute state opportunities and benefits unequally. Identification of citizens with smaller collectives seems to have taken root. Even well meaning policies (e.g.: job reservation for disadvantaged groups) may have bolstered the idea of smaller identities as not only legitimate but the most effective basis to derive state benefits.
- *Thirdly*, the onslaught of modernity and technology has failed to replace religion as the essential reference point for the majority. The sense of



social injustice and alienation perceived to go with the New World Order contributes to the renewed assertion of a collectivity in terms that are meaningful to the average citizen, usually ethnic, race or religion. In this context the presence and nature of civil society institutions are becoming pivotal to renegotiate the state-citizen relationship. They need to act as intermediary negotiators and provide effective alternative means for self-expression and collective intervention. In their absence religious/cultural/ethnic based/defined institutions play this role and are strengthened. Autonomous civil society institutions are increasingly vital to promote women's and citizen's rights.

However, in all regions of the South women recognise that while NGO's have gained greater acceptance and legitimacy, they are no replacement for the political process, as they do not represent the will of the people nor can they bring about structural and systemic change.

Critical feminist perspectives on the state and state power in Africa

Some African feminists assert that African states are not stable enough to be analysed. Thus commonalities are seen only at a distance and generally derived from external forces that have a homogenizing effect such as Structural Adjustment Programs. Another difficulty concerns the fact that knowledge of African politics is derived from political science, a field that is state centered. The consequence of the focus on the state is preoccupation with the failure of the African State and a negative portrayal of the state as corrupt, patrimonial and a source of African crisis.

Feminists in the region centre their arguments on the way in which mainstream critiques fail to understand the complexities that shape African experiences. They argue that "critical readings of the vast number of publications on various aspects of Africa politics suggests that the assumptions that have been made about the form and location of power have been deeply flawed. Mama argues that African politics continue to be presented in ways that homogenise, simplify and reduce the diverse and complex machinations of political power in postcolonial Africa".¹⁵



One aspect of the danger of this generalisation is that international policy on good governance and political restructuring which are based on negative assumptions about the African state are prescribed to African states with no regard to the complexities and diversity among them. Indeed “the programming around good governance, political restructuring and capacity building display the limitations of this knowledge base, exacerbated by the institutional characteristics of the agencies, and the exigencies emanating from the political and financial interests prevailing back home – home in London, Washington and Oslo.¹⁶

Others argue that the notion of the state as a complex, contradictory and desegregated set of institutions is much more useful than the idea of a state as a monolithic entity.¹⁷ A wide variety of state forms exist in the region and there are important variations. Colonialism in Africa was not uniform in that not all-African states were colonised and among those that were colonised they did not share similar experiences. Each state has its own distinctive political history, which is a product of specific national and sub-national constellations of forces old and new. Due to the dearth of information, commonalities in the workings of gender, politics and power in Africa are likely to be abstract and based on generalisations. Much of what has been written on the African state has dwelt on various manifestations of authoritarianism and corruption and little attention has been paid to organisational analysis, institutional culture, formal and informal structures of power, or the complexities of gender, ethnicity, and religion within the mainstream structures of power and public administration. Between the poles of authoritarianism and democracy, Africa displays a wide array of unique political forms and experiences that were innovative in response to local philosophical and material conditions.

Generalisations and current discourse tend to demonise African leaders and cast African people as passive victims of state machinery, who are unable to curb the excesses of dictators or to exercise any civic responsibility. The unfortunate consequence of this literature is that it resonates with the current stance of international financial institutions that agree that the African State is a source of crisis and the answer is to diminish the state.

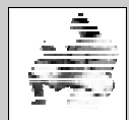


The view of the African State as corrupt, parasitic, bloated and authoritarian, which is part of a dominant anti-states discourse on Africa, has colonial origins. It casts Africans in the image of passive victims of oppressive states, which they are unable to do anything about. Yet, studies of social movements in Africa subvert that general picture. Western academics seem agreed on the cause of 'the problem', and on the solution – that is, rolling back the state, with the result that throughout Africa there are currently 100 000 experts on the ground costing over \$4 billion a year in technical assistance fees.¹⁸ The pertinent questions for critical analyses are: Who owns the state, who directs policy? Are African states real states at all? And where does power reside?¹⁹

Given the changing political landscape we cannot afford to ditch the state, as the few gains that women have had in Africa have come via the state; moreover, the consequences for women have been extremely dire in contexts where the state has been destroyed – Rwanda, Liberia and Sierra Leone – where women are living in conflict and post-conflict situations or have become stateless. An emerging debate in feminist discourse is the phenomena of male patriarchal leaderships championing the women's cause, and of 'First Ladyism', which has advanced very conservative agendas, need critical analysis.²⁰

Three main processes currently dominate the continent: Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP's), the process of democratic transitions, and that of globalisation. How have these processes of transformation been linked to politics and power in Africa and how have they affected women and their citizenship in Africa? Africa's economic integration into a global economy is not modernising Africa, but rather making Africa perform better for global capitalism. The postcolonial state, in renegotiating its power and political legitimacy, had imposed its own social logic, with specific implications in respect of both ethnicity and gender relations. The primary preoccupation within Africa today is not dealing with human problems, but achieving macroeconomic stability. This has led to social movements questioning the legitimacy of states.²¹

Feminists in Africa analyse states from the perspective of the politics of exclusion, and female power and the politics of subversion. The politics of



exclusion (both ethnicity-based and gender based) characterised postcolonial development policies. In Africa the state has become the means through which global capitalism transforms, restructures and realigns production systems. Women's economic marginalisation and precarious situation today, with fewer and fewer resources to survive globalisation, illustrate the failure of modernisation. While women were part of movements which gave birth to democracies in Africa, the fundamental reason for their exclusion from the political arena lay in persistence of an impenetrable androcentric and masculine world. Women's experiences in Africa resonate with those of other women in the South. Women in Africa contest the political terrain in many ways.

The strategies adopted are complex and varied and include appropriating the international discourse on rights and mobilizing within Parliament. Within the civil service, however, women who entered as part of their engagement at the highest political level have had to contend with transforming the internal cultures of government and making an impact in terms of resource allocation and policy processes. In this they could not rely solely on the structures of government but on the movements outside of the government.

The state in Africa, was not devised in the interests of the African people. Debates on the state in Africa need to go back to political formation before the Berlin Conference and prior to European contact, that is, before there were colonial states or what is now termed 'nation states'. More over while Africans must rediscover their cultural heritage, they should not romanticize the African past. In transitions from illegitimate political order or arrangements to legitimate governments male leaders usually sought to re-invent themselves and forget how they had come to power, but women's NGO's created by First Ladies were usually named by the date of the military coups, and thereby immortalize the events which their husbands were trying to erase from the public memory.²²



The state, power and politics: Feminist perspectives from South East Asia²³

Postcolonial South East Asia continues to chart dramatic political and economic changes that often escape conventional (western) standards of analysis. Strong and autocratic governments (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia) have weathered external criticisms and citizens' demands for more freedom and individual rights. Remarkable still is the visible material progress enjoyed by citizens despite restrictions of their civil rights even when they are under one-man absolute rule (Brunei).

Economic prosperity versus democratisation

Undoubtedly, economic progress proved to be a more persuasive justification than spaces for political freedoms. This was true in Indonesia under the indisputably repressive and violent leadership of Suharto, whose administration gave Indonesians a taste of domestic and economic stability.

With the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, Filipinos take pride in the restoration of their liberal democratic traditions even while the country's economy is being pushed down by inefficiency, corruption, and elite capitalists' interests.

In Burma, no matter how much the present military junta cleansed its image it could not erase the victory of the democratic opposition in the 1990 elections. Although it granted temporary reprieve to the National League of Democracy's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, by putting her under house arrest, this move is seen as just a ploy the military regime to remain in power.

This stands in sharp contrast, for instance, to Cambodia's reversal to monarchical rule or with the replacement of a Thai civilian elected government with politicians known for their military ties in the 1995 elections. Though Chuan Leekpai was known as an honest and principled leader, the Thais were dissatisfied with his democratic style of leadership because they expected him "to tackle problems head on". As one writer puts it: "traditionally, it mattered little to the Thai or Cambodian merchant or farmer whether a government



calls itself democratic so long as he or she feels its weight little as possible and benefits from its security as much possible - a pragmatic immunity to ideology often lost on outside observers” (Vatikiotis, 1996).

Tensions exist between those who regard themselves outside the political and economic centre, and the middle class, who have found refuge in strong and autocratic governments. This begs the question of whether enrichment of the dispossessed would ease these tensions, or for that matter, equal distribution of wealth equals more equitable political participation?

Postcolonial South East Asia’s bold declaration that western conception of democracy is unsuitable to “Asian values” and merely serving to conceal western political and economic interests, challenged political analysts to scrutinised just what this ‘Asian value’ is all about and how it has informed democratic development in the region. It must be noted that not all of South East Asian countries share Lee Kuan Yew’s views on Asian values, the espousal of which is credited to him. It is also instructive to mention that even the normative concept of democracy is yielding to shifts that can lead to “improvement or deterioration” thus positioning it in a “continuous state of becoming”.²⁴ It is in this ‘state of becoming’ that one democratic theorist coined the term polyarchy in place of democracy.²⁵

As in the case of Africa, South East Asia escapes the neat dichotomy presented by ruler/ruled, dominant/dominator, or oppressed/oppressor mode of analysis. Despite its progressive and militant rhetoric, this type of analysis homogenizes the power of the state and fails to capture how in the course of everyday life, both the oppressed and the oppressor come together in the arena of contestation.

Modes of democracy and modes of citizenship in South East Asia

Emerging feminist views highlight how concepts of democracy and citizenship carry within their historical origin the exclusion of women, of those without properties and of racial minorities. Conspicuously absent from amongst various brands of “democracies” in the region is the embodiment of republicanism: “the idea that the discharge of public duties is an ennobling



activity that demands exacting subjection to the law, the selfless service to the public interest”²⁶ (O’Donnel, in Pagaduan). This would explain why citizens in most countries of the region are expressly dissatisfied with their governments.

Conflation of democracy with material progress

In Singapore political participation has been recast to promote material acquisition and progress as the basis of “entitlement of citizenship”. Material conditions are used as the “criteria” to define, assess and legitimate government’s performance. Similar trends are noted in Malaysia. This conflation of democracy and material progress is in large measure accepted amongst the middle classes in South East Asia.

Citizens have a very strong concept of what is unjust and detest tyrannical leadership and excessive use of power. They also defer to power. However, the stranglehold of state machineries and a culturally driven sense of obedience explains why popular protests can be curbed for a long time as in the case of Burma.

The marginalised and the dispossessed provide the ruling elite the cultural resources and the language to recreate and reproduce itself. This represents the power of values and meaning from which ideas are either concealed or publicly magnified.

***The culturalisation of the political and politicisation of the cultural – Contesting power from the margins*²⁷**

“Popular culture is one of the sites where the struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged”, making ‘culture’ in itself ‘culturally constructed. Thus, power is contested, recreated, and reproduced, marked and signified by cultural politics.

In the context of contemporary South East Asia, a region singled out for its pursuit of economic modernisation by observers, the culturalisation of its political landscape is put into our attention and consciousness both by the ruling elite and those from the margins of the political centre²⁸ (Khan, 1998). (e.g. in the streets of Yangon, red and white banners ubiquitously



remind the Burmese of the People's Desire to "oppose those relying on external elements acting as stooges holding negative views" or to observe "discipline" because it "leads to safety").

Identity or cultural formation, also known as nation-building, does not exactly assume a straight off and similitude unfolding (as the ruling/hegemonic elite would like to believe). Individuals have demonstrated adaptive, multifaceted, and flexible capacity to alter or modify 'grand narratives' and find suitability in their own location and position in the social order.

Culture, and its material and physical dimensions, shapes expression of individual subjectivity and is itself 'culturally constructed' (Khan, 1995). As a product of cultural construction, culture never assumes a complete and unitary sense of purpose; discourse production appears to be no more the monopoly of those who are in the centre of power (state, academe, institutions, etc.) but is being produced by the "self-proclaimed margins" (Mann, 1996).

Reconceptualising gender/sexual difference and power

Feminist argue that concepts of democracy, citizenship, and equality are masculinised; male power negates women's agency and subjectivity, and that of others in the margins (of men who may be in the margins of power because of their racial and class position and those of women who may be in the centre of power because of their racial and class position).

The concept of difference, however, is not always amenable to feminist theorising. It commonly denotes sexual difference between women and men borne by race, class, age, sexual orientation, amongst others. Most prefer using the concept of gender to highlight the social construction of femininity and masculinity. This approach, however, draws attention to the exterior aspects of femininity and masculinity and thereby obscures the interior/subjective aspects of a gendered male or gendered female.

Those who are inclined to stress sexual difference point in its centrality to the formation of human culture. Braidotti for instance, asks: "Can we formulate otherness, differences, without devaluing it? Can we think of the other as positively other?"²⁹ For her, the feminist goal is not to erase differences but "to recover the feminine within sexual difference, to generate an



autonomous female imagery beyond existing stereotypes of women”.³⁰ Put this way, (traditionally conceived) femininity becomes “the privileged marker of difference” and sidesteps the analytical tendency of enclosing women in male-centred norms.

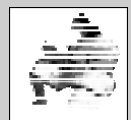
Equality remains central in the concept of sexual difference but one that calls for equality that respects difference. Because there is also inequality in the struggle for equality, exposing differences becomes all the more compelling. Braidotti (1997) puts its political potential this way:

“politically this means that the terms of possible feminist coalitions are not to be sought in the categories of “sameness”-be it sisterhood ...or some commonality of oppression. The political focus is shifted instead toward a politics of coalition based on the confrontation of differences among women (and men). Here issues of national identity, nationalism and religion are of the greatest importance. In this regard, sexual difference can be seen as a critique of emancipationism or equality minded feminism”.

How do we conceive of power that is not necessarily oppositional (control and resistance) or de-centre it from asymmetry (inequality and domination) but in a way that reveals how its (assumed) negative deployment can be redeployed positively? While Cooper (1995) maintains the importance of inequality and domination in understanding power, she finds it futile to associate power with dominant or superior groups because even their choices and actions are contained (and thus limited) in the way they exercise their own brand of power. It also organizes out marginalised groups because they are perceived as having no access to power because power is reified in one dominant class or group.³¹

Power becomes productive (i.e. produces effects) when one starts from the fresh approach that the oppressed possess power and that they do challenge inequality, which may not necessarily generate effects but at least imply a potential for impact or the motivation to resist, contest and challenge their subordination.

Identities are not casually or unthinkingly taken as givens either by traditions or external imposition but contested to suit people’s circum-



stances.³² This contestation, however, cannot be simply taken as a struggle between the ruler and the ruled, the elite or the masses but how in the course of such a struggle, both are able to bring themselves, by virtue of their identities to enter such constestation (and by extension generate effects). Totalising markers and identifiers like citizenship, national identity, rights, equality, which the dominant groups perceive as their grand projects, can be interrogated and challenged by marginalised groups using the same sets of markers but may be located outside the boundaries determined by the dominant groups. This is because power is located in crisscross patterns that spawn effects on the “bodies, desires, and knowledge of social subjects (Cooper, 1995).

While power position is still traditionally mapped out in terms of ‘centres’ and ‘marginal oppositions’,³³ Mann (1996) argues that the margins are the “function and effects of the centre the very means by which the centre establishes its line of defence”.

Preferences, identities, and subjectivities, form legitimate terrain for progressive politics, if not transformational politics. The call for an ethical approach is to find strategies that engage with “dis-empowering preferences and identities” in ways that work against, rather than accentuate existing principles and forms of systematic (dis)advantage.

Empowerment goes beyond the (subjective) fulfilment of desires to highlight the scope and character of decision-making processes are they found in the home, community or workplace. Democratic participation and involvement can be viewed and valued as a good in itself. Yet the character of preference - the demands they make upon decision-making processes- are not fixed, but alter as decision-making structures change. Attempts to generate equality of empowerment through more symmetrical structures reshape the nature of our preferences and desires. At the same time, the changing character of our aspirations, pleasures, and pain inform the discourses and practices through which our participation occurs.³⁴



Feminist perspectives from Latin America and the Caribbean on the state, power and politics³⁵

Women in Latin America are concerned about the absence of feminist debates on the State. However, a careful extrapolation from different documents reveal that Latin American feminists describe States as patriarchal, and consider them as the political expression of domination of patriarchal societies. Feminists also describe states as class-conscious, racist, and as producers and reproducers of different social inequalities.

Feminists in Latin America analyse particular aspects of states such as military influence, the repressive system and lack of human rights implementation, the discriminatory legal system, the sexist administration of justice, the educational system, and the influence of the catholic church which managed to turn sin into offence. Moreover the absence and the inability of women to exercise their rights, and the lack of women in decision-making levels have also been questioned.

Given this, Latin American women, particularly, feminists have oscillated between State “bedeviling” and “functionalisation”. The approach has been an attack on the state while trying to understand its role and functions. The chronology of women’s struggles for political rights and participation reflects the painful experience of exclusion from pre to post colonial eras.

Women’s political participation, even in emancipation wars, did not result in important gains for them vis-à-vis the institutionality attained by men. This further highlights the contradictions and the heterogeneous features of a continent where, for many years, military sovereignty had supremacy over popular sovereignty. The constant tension between liberal republican aspirations and a pre-capitalist economy of large agricultural and forestry estates, as well as mining enclaves with the exploitation of the workforce played itself out in various ways.

Latin American regimes have generally been autocratic and the constitutional system has been republican and liberal. In this context, suffragist



struggles for the right to female citizenship took place between the end of the Nineteenth Century until the mid Twentieth Century.

Claiming political space

The access of a minority of women to higher education, enabled women to question their exclusion from the political system. Over a period of 32 years, Latin American countries, one by one, conferred political rights on women. Two factors contributed to women's disenchantment with their victory. On one hand, women had the right to vote but few of them were elected into positions of power, least of all those who had struggled for suffrage. The second factor was little democratic stability on the continent. As Aníbal Quijano stated, "sectors and elements closely linked to inequality and arbitrariness, despotism and obscurantism" took power.

Transformation, revolution and populism

Transformation of society was also promoted through *revolutions, populism* and *reformism*. While only four revolutions have been registered in the continent there have been some benefits resulting, particularly, as regards access to health and education. These revolutionary processes can be considered male-centered in terms of power to make decisions and state action. Populist struggles were more widespread but did not lead to significant gains, especially in land reforms.

Common features among these States have been nationalism, explicit anti-imperialism and anti-communist Governments that have actively sought capitalist modernisation through economic programs of imports substitution, industrialisation and social security. The advent of industrialisation, in the forties and fifties saw women enter labour markets and gain access to social benefits; but their entry did not lead to the formation of autonomous organisations with potential to have any real impact.

Dictatorships have been amongst the most developed Latin American political traditions for two centuries and as a consequence the denial of citizenship and basic rights, have become common features. Women have



had no participation in such governments except as part of the subjugated or as opponents of state oppression. In countries such as Paraguay, the two poles which best represent patriarchy are precisely the warrior hero as holder of political power and the single women raising his children. The fathers of the “motherhood” are not aware of responsible paternity.

Recent dictatorships which spread throughout the continent during the sixties, seventies and eighties of this century, indicate that, within this repressive framework, a new Latin American feminism emerged. Small groups or a critical core of women waged a political struggle against repressive regimes. Suffragists debated principles of equality from a left perspective and feminists began to engage with the left on the contradictions within liberalisation and gender equality. During the eighties, women began to confront the State with a discourse of their own, based on their varied experiences within the patriarchal, military or authoritarian state systems.

During the eighties democratisation gained impetus. From the start, feminist and other excluded groups, struggled to have equal participation in democracy. But, the result of women’s struggles for recognition and inclusion was only “a room of their own in the State”.³⁶ Gender equality mechanisms and, until now, even democracies have not been able to be more than a formality where institutions do not guarantee equal rights for female and male citizens.

Feminist perspectives of power and politics from the Pacific

Power and politics³⁷

Constitutional politics process and associated legislation came into effect in almost all Pacific states without the organized participation of women as a distinctive force. However, in some instances, the Constitutions of many countries, such as Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, included affirmative action provision that could be invoked in favour of women. In Fiji, for instance, Slatter (1998) said that the new Constitution, which came into effect in July 1998, offers great encouragement



for women when looked at broadly rather than by simply looking at the explicit provisions for women's equality. A number of significant gains were made:

- The change in the citizenship provisions (Chapter 3) to give women equal citizenship rights with men.
- The Bill of Rights (Chapter 4), especially the inclusion of gender as a right to 'equality before the law' (38(1)), and other guaranteed rights, such as the right to basic education, the right to form and join trade unions, to organize and bargain collectively, and to fair labour practices, including humane and proper working conditions.
- The provisions for the establishment of a Human Rights Commission, which strengthens the Bill of Rights, which includes sexual harassment as a form of unfair discrimination. One of the Commissioners is a woman.
- The Compact, which provides 'moral support' for women's equality or social advancement.
- The strengthened human rights and accountability provisions (e.g. freedom of information, leadership code, an independent judiciary and constitutional offices and fairer electoral arrangements will benefit the nation as a whole including women.³⁸

Women in the Pacific are generally depicted as the powerless and helpless victims of dominantly patriarchal societies. In fact, women in many pre-colonial societies enjoyed considerable power and had control over resources, such as land, and in decision-making processes which affect their lives. It is true, of course, that in certain societies, such as Tonga, women chiefs enjoyed many privileges which were denied their commoner sisters but even so, women still commanded respect and still enjoyed higher status than their male siblings. In matrilineal societies women had control but even in what would be termed 'patriarchal' societies, there were provisions for women to participate in community affairs and strategies that women could employ to access resources and benefits.



Conclusions

We face a many-sided State which is in the process of transformation. Women have learnt to deal with the parliamentary side of the State, to make proposals, to lobby, and to obtain rights. We have been less concerned with the use of Executive and Judicial Power. This is due to the fact that apart from being dissimilar, each one has a different logic and we have to decode them to understand them and take action. Added to this, feminists are not able to engage effectively with state structures.

The nation-state is in the process of transformation and is weaker than before. Rights discourses give women a broader field of action, but we face the challenge of rebuilding citizenship and women's subjective citizenship, which is undervalued, even by ourselves. We must go on deepening our knowledge of formal aspects but we must also work on non-formal aspects.

The fact that human rights laws do not come into effect, is a serious problem. It is important to work on the Constitutional State to ensure that the legal framework and laws protecting women's rights are implemented.

There is a gap represented by poor women and women in general who attend political training courses, and who generally question the starting point of democracy. The challenging issue is to think about how and whether democracy exists in our regions, and what are the benefits for women.

Legal or constitutional effectiveness is not only the State's responsibility, but also civil society's responsibility. We must imagine and create the mechanisms to achieve this. Electoral participation through quotas constitutes a good example, but are not enough to result in gender equity.

We must work on macro and micro powers. If we take this to the political field, we are forced to analyse local powers which are more dynamic and which have greater possibilities of exerting influence than the processes of a country as a whole. But, we must take into consideration that many of these micro processes are very conservative.



There are a series of problems linked to the specific historical experience and to political culture. For example, in many countries of the South, citizens associate poor people's welfare with the need for authoritarian governments. Gains for the poor are not identified with democracy and the poor themselves long for dictatorships, or consider the State as a shelter instead of a point of conflict. Many of these issues have not been understood in all their complexities by women's movements.

Political openness offers new possibilities for women, but feminists are at present more fragmented than before. We are losing the emancipation potential due to the diversity of claims. We need to ensure that the different courses of action and claims are linked to inequalities of class, race, gender, ethnic and religious discussions.

Feminists need to create alternative development courses of action and to work towards progressive democratic governance. The fact that feminists may make proposals not only for women, but also for the whole society, that they may manage societies and not just have "a room of their own" in the State, is a challenge.

Some challenges and contradictions

- Forms of democracy have been built on the pillars of economic, political culture, institutions and political behaviour although the role and significance given to each of these varies.
- Countries in the South (Africa and Asia) have experienced democratic changes at a rapidity not seen in other parts of the world. The whole area of democratic governance is still contested and the nature of pluralism has to be understood in relation to historical and contemporary forms of exclusionary politics. Social activity is no longer about whether pluralist democracy is desirable but how quickly it can be attained and in what form.
- Economic development may sometimes be a spur (South Korea) to democracy but economic stagnation or collapse, can undermine the basis



of authoritarian/ illegitimate governments and pave the way for democracy. However, in some cases it has paved the way or strengthened the hands of anti-democratic elite's who the use material resources to reward friends and punish foes giving rise to what we call in South Africa the "Patriotic Bourgeoisie" or cronycapitalism.

- Political institutions have changed over time and have been shaped by a multiplicity of forces including historical, external and internal factors. Weak and ineffective institutions make the relationships between the governed and government problematic, but over powerful institutions, in societies where there are few or no autonomous centres of power (civil society) can leave those in control of the state machinery unchecked.
- Development tends to be tied through Aid to a commitment to western style democracy/pluralism and in the post cold war, post modern period, this has led to a greater acceptance of political and economic liberalisation (the objectives of competition between parties in place of single-party hegemony and competition in the market in place of state planning.)
- The impacts have varied but there are complementary and contradictory pressures. There is internal and external pressure to have open competition for power and civil liberties and then there is economic-liberalisation (one dollar one vote in place of one person one vote) where decision-making is removed from the majority. This disjuncture creates continuous sites of struggle. The issue here is how to ensure that market led strategies and state-led development processes are able to secure the interests and meet the needs of the majority.
- Economic-liberalisation poses limits to the state's power but the counterweight to this is not only in the hands of the masses but in changing the rules that determine transnational decisions and agreements.
- There is a crisis of distribution in terms of economic and political power and the position of women in this process is a fundamental concern.
- The battle ground for the debate is what political system would best serve the needs of capitalism. Liberal democracy and capitalism are com-



pletely compatible. This poses interesting challenges for the region and women's emancipation.

- Questioning the nation state is important and the questions raised critical. Can the formation of the nation state be challenged if it does not take into account representation of those who have been excluded, the majority, the environment and the need for patterns of sustainable livelihoods?
- The process of inventing and restructuring the nation state in itself is not dangerous but what is dangerous is the manner in which forms of cultural politics and the issue of narrow identities promotes racism and other divides in opposition to globalisation.

Notes

- 1 Commitment 4: The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action – World Summit for Social Development, 06-12 March 1995, United Nations, New York
- 2 Diaw, 1999 at DAWN Africa PRST Research Meeting, Cape Town
- 3 Assié-Lumumba, 1999 at DAWN Africa PRST Research Meeting, Cape Town
- 4 Citing Lumumba-Kasongo, 1999
- 5 Citing Lumumba-Kasongo, 1999
- 6 Assié-Lumumba, 1999.
- 7 Assié-Lumumba, 1999 at DAWN Africa PRST Research Meeting, Cape Town
- 8 Morgenthau, H.J. 1967. *Politics Among Nations*, p26. New York: Knops.
- 9 Vera Soares, 1999 at DAWN Latin America PRST Workshop, Brazil
- 10 “Grassroots” is a term used to denote poor people who are often located in local, underdeveloped conditions.
- 11 Farida Shaheed, *Politics and Power in South Asia – 2000*, DAWN PRST Research meeting
- 12 This section has been based on the analysis from Farida Shaheed's paper on *Politics and Power in South Asia – 2000*, DAWN PRST Research meeting.
- 13 Farida Shaheed, 2000:27 in *Power and Politics in South Asia*, DAWN PRST Research meeting
- 14 Farida Shaheed, f: 2000:27-31, *Politics and Power in South Asia – 2000*, DAWN PRST Research meeting
- 15 Mama, 1999 at DAWN Africa PRST Research Meeting, Cape Town
- 16 Ibid



- 17 Hassim, S and Meintjies S, 1999, DAWN Africa PRST Research Meeting, Cape
Town
- 18 (Mkandawire *et al*, 1999 citing 1995 figures).
- 19 Amina Mama, 1999, at DAWN Africa PRST Research Meeting, Cape Town
- 20 Aminata Diaw, 1999, at DAWN Africa PRST Research Meeting, Cape Town
- 21 Aminata Diaw, as above. She also draws on Samir Amin's work in this analy-
sis.
- 22 Assie-Lumumba, 1999, at DAWN Africa PRST Research Meeting, Cape Town
- 23 Much of the analysis for this section is drawn from Pagaduan, Maureen, 2000:
Power, Politics and Culture in South East Asia: A preview to contemporary
South East Asia, paper prepared for DAWN PRST Research.
- 24 Almond in Diamond, 1994
- 25 Dahl in Diamond, 1994
- 26 O'Donnell in Pagaduan
- 27 Maureen Pagaduan and others; 2000 in Power, Politics and Culture in South
East Asia, paper prepared for DAWN Research Meeting.
- 28 Khan, 1998
- 29 Felski, 1997
- 30 Ibid
- 31 Cooper, 1995
- 32 Khan, 1998
- 33 Mann, 1996
- 34 Maureen Pagaduan, 2000
- 35 This section has been based on the analysis by Line Barsino, 2000, DAWN
PRST regional meeting, Rio, and on the Latin America regional PRST report.
- 36 Fempress
- 37 Ana Maui Taufe – Ulungaki's paper: 2000, A regional synthesis of PRST in the
Pacific, DAWN PRST Inter-regional meeting, Cape Town
- 38 Slatter Claire, 1998: Fiji



Chapter 3

The state and globalisation

“We commit ourselves to ensuring that when structural adjustment programmes are agreed to they include social development goals, in particular eradicating poverty, promoting full and productive employment, and enhancing social integration.”¹

“We commit ourselves to an improved and strengthened framework for international, regional and sub-regional co-operation for social development, in a spirit of partnership, through the United Nations and other multilateral institutions.”²

Introduction

The state, the way it operates in contemporary society and whose interests are served are outcomes of history and other factors. States have been influenced by colonialism, post colonial and neo colonial forces in many instances. In many countries, local capitalist forces have been consolidated through the penetration and expansion of international capitalism, often mediated through local elites in what are seen as “culturally acceptable ways”. While there is growing emphasis on globalisation and global management much of the discourse tends to reflect an a-historical perspective.

As acknowledged by the United Nations Development Programme,

“Globalisation is not new, but the present era has distinctive features. Shrinking space, shrinking time and disappearing borders are linking people’s lives more deeply, more intensely, more immediately than ever before.”³



These features have had a devastating impact on countries in the South, especially women.

Borders have become permeable

Another characteristic of this phase of globalisation is the challenge posed by the rapidity and scale at which changes occur. Key features include the manner in which information technologies have restructured production, distribution and communication processes. This has made possible the exchange of goods, services and labour across the globe at an unsurpassed pace.

Borders have become permeable, the traditional division of North and South is being questioned. Regions engage in negotiations across traditional boundaries.

North and South as development directions

While the notion of the South emerged in relation to the dominance of the north, it was more than a geographical location. The South, as an ideological construct emerged as an alternative development direction based on the need for self-definition and as a way of asserting a people-centred position within the dominant global system. The divide between the North and South continues to exist but in every northern country there is the South, manifested in profound inequalities and various forms of poverty. Likewise, within the geographic South, there are features of the North, as elites emerge and inequalities grow between the rich and poor.

An inevitable result seems to be the inability of state machinery to manage the changes or influence the direction of change to benefit the poorest. The state is under threat. Some argue that the state is being reorganised to serve market interests. This is evidenced by the increasing prominence given to quasi-government structures and the influence placed on states through multi national financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation.



Economic global governance: In whose interests?⁴

Common interests, concerns and responsibilities point to the necessity for global agreements and institutions for global governance. Central international institutions are rapidly assuming the roles and powers of a form of global economic government, particularly the World Trade Organisation. However these institutions have not emerged from shared motivations and common agreements. The WTO is the commanding institutional expression and a key instrument for the creation and consolidation of an increasingly integrated and liberalised 'global' economy, and an emerging system of 'global government'. Feminists assert that such institutions have emerged from and are fundamentally driven by interests in, and the needs of, the most industrialised countries.

Liberalisation to facilitate globalisation

The emerging global order is driven and characterised by vast economic growth and worldwide expansion and penetration by global corporations, facilitated and promoted by liberalisation. The two are integrally interdependent and mutually reinforcing. *Globalisation* is the substantive process of economic and technological expansion promoting the opening up and integration of the entire world into and under one economic system. *Liberalisation* provides the policy lubricants and produces the appropriate regulatory/legal frameworks – and neo-liberalism the theoretical formulations – to ensure the smooth implementation of the process. Thus 'globalisation' is an economic and technological process and also a political and ideological project.⁵

Structural adjustment programmes: Setting the basis for globalisation

Liberalisation to facilitate globalisation was (and still is) driven in most African – and many Latin American, Asian, Caribbean and Pacific – countries by 'structural adjustment programmes' (SAPs), directly or indirectly under the auspices of the IMF and World Bank.⁶ These 'adjustments' are



justified theoretically in terms of the necessity for such countries to ‘integrate themselves into the global economy’.⁷ In practice, this means *opening up* to exporters and investors from the economic North. Although some of the Latin American economies provided considerable openings for trade and investment to the most industrialised countries, many of them – and even more so the newly ‘liberalised’ and ‘marketised’ African and Caribbean economies – nonetheless had relatively small markets, with limited immediate economic potential.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, most of the promising newly industrialised or ‘emerging’ economies, particularly in Asia, with huge markets and attractive immediate investment potential, protected themselves against foreign trade penetration and were very demanding in the conditions and constraints placed upon foreign investors. They managed to maintain relative financial and economic independence, and a certain policy leeway; because they had not (then) come under IMF obligations and liberalisation programmes.⁸ Companies from the most industrialised countries therefore frequently had to rely on bilateral processes and pressures by their governments to try to force such economies to allow them in and/or to operate under the conditions they required.

For these and other reasons,⁹ by the mid-1980s both entrepreneurial and governmental actors in the more developed countries (DCs) were convinced that a more universal institution, and comprehensive global agreements had to be created to ensure that all such countries ‘open up’ their economies. Since all countries need external trade, to one degree or another, and since the Asian economies were more than usually dependent upon ‘export-led’ growth, international trade relations and negotiations provided the ideal terrain on which to pressure such governments to open up their economies.

Trade liberalisation was both an important end in itself and a useful instrument to compel all countries to liberalise other sectors. The prolonged Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) negotiations (1986–1994) became a process to promote, not only wider and deeper trade liberalisation but other highly significant ‘trade-related’ agreements.



The new agreement on Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMs), for example, was designed to ensure greater freedom for foreign investment. TRIMs constrained specific ‘trade-distorting’ governmental conditions on FDI (foreign direct investment), with the threat of retaliatory trade sanctions through the newly created World Trade Organisation (WTO) that also emerged from the Uruguay Round (UR). However, as can be seen from table 3.1 (Increasing global integration), regions in the South have not benefited significantly from FDI compared to the North.

Table 3.1: Increasing global integration

	Sub-Saharan Africa	Arab States	East Asia	South Asia	South East Asia and the Pacific	Latin America and Caribbean	Eastern Europe and the CIS	OECD	World
Exports of goods and services – US \$ billions (average annual total) <i>Italic indicates global share (percent)</i>									
1970's	29.10	64.82	23.55	21.67	27.64	38.76	–	796.20	1,003.90
	<i>2.90</i>	<i>6.46</i>	<i>2.35</i>	<i>2.16</i>	<i>2.75</i>	<i>3.86</i>	<i>–</i>	<i>79.31</i>	<i>100.00</i>
1980's	58.97	124.43	112.79	34.26	99.48	102.90	34.20	2,072.21	2,650.93
	<i>2.22</i>	<i>4.69</i>	<i>4.25</i>	<i>1.29</i>	<i>3.75</i>	<i>3.88</i>	<i>1.29</i>	<i>78.17</i>	<i>100.00</i>
1990–96	81.24	162.80	369.44	55.70	272.72	219.63	321.13	3,724.00	5,235.93
	<i>1.55</i>	<i>3.11</i>	<i>7.06</i>	<i>1.06</i>	<i>5.21</i>	<i>4.19</i>	<i>6.13</i>	<i>71.12</i>	<i>100.00</i>
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) – US \$ billions (average annual total) <i>Italic indicates global share (percent)</i>									
1970's	0.76	0.86	0.22	0.16	1.06	2.99	0.01	15.44	21.60
	<i>3.54</i>	<i>3.96</i>	<i>1.00</i>	<i>0.76</i>	<i>4.89</i>	<i>13.85</i>	<i>0.03</i>	<i>71.49</i>	<i>100.00</i>
1980'S	1.25	4.39	3.08	0.21	4.55	7.45	0.10	72.15	93.43
	<i>1.33</i>	<i>4.70</i>	<i>3.29</i>	<i>0.22</i>	<i>4.87</i>	<i>7.97</i>	<i>0.11</i>	<i>77.22</i>	<i>100.00</i>
1990–96	2.81	2.19	25.40	1.43	18.94	23.41	7.60	155.81	238.53
	<i>1.18</i>	<i>0.92</i>	<i>10.65</i>	<i>0.60</i>	<i>7.94</i>	<i>9.81</i>	<i>3.18</i>	<i>65.32</i>	<i>100.00</i>
Source: Oxford University Press, <i>Human Development Report 1999</i> , UNDP, New York.									



Selective protectionism and pro-active initiatives: Setting the terms

Industrialised countries had other pro-active as well as protective motivations in their promotion of new global rules, and in their strategies within the multi-sectoral Uruguay Round of negotiations. The pro-active strategies were for the promotion of their strong and emergent new industries and economic sectors. The protective measures were in support of their economically vulnerable domestic industries or economic sectors.

With regard to the latter, the USA, in particular, came to the Uruguay Round (UR) determined to deflect demands for the much-delayed opening up of its markets to competitive textiles and clothing exports from the developing countries. And the US government managed to hold off the trade liberalisation that it was officially committed to – and that it was demanding of others – by securing a further ten year extension of its effective derogation from GATT obligations.¹⁰ This was achieved through the ‘end-loading’ of most of its phased tariff reductions to the later part of the transition period, in conjunction with quotas and other technical devices. This transition period was designed to give such domestic industries, and the US national economy, further time to get through major economic adjustments and technological transformations.

Equally energetic battles were pursued by the USA, the EU and Japan during the Uruguay Round in defence of their respective agricultural sectors. With the US demanding that the others liberalise their agricultural markets, and the latter resisting exposing their smaller scale (but politically influential) agricultural producers to large-scale and highly competitive US agri-business. Once again, with economic muscle, technical resources and tactical skill, the EU and Japan managed to hold off agricultural trade liberalisation and to sustain their agricultural subsidisation programmes for a further period. This was necessary, they argued, in order to deal with the economic, social and political adjustments that would be required.¹¹

Feminists assert that these and other offensive/defensive battles by and between the ‘triad’ dominated the UR negotiations and diverted attention



(intentionally?) from their other pro-active and forward-looking strategies to promote and protect significant new, and increasingly important industries and economic sectors. While defending their old, weaker or declining industries, the major industrial powers were actively intervening for the promotion of the new economic/technological revolution already under way. By creating global legal frameworks and specific agreements to ensure their continued domination of the epochal process into the future.

Knowledge appropriation and commercialisation

In this context, the agreement on Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (known as TRIPS) was one of the most significant achievements to emerge from the Uruguay Round for the most advanced economies and their cutting-edge industries. Ostensibly, this was designed to stop international pirating of products and processes, abuses of 'labels' and other patented rights. However, the more fundamental effect is to facilitate corporate appropriation, 'ownership' and control of biological resources and traditional knowledge from around the world through patenting under TRIPS.

The aim and effect of TRIPS is tighter control on access to and use of ground-breaking new scientific developments and technological innovations, particularly in information and communication systems and the even more propitious biotechnology sector. Governments collaborate with global corporation in the effective and extensive monopolisation of scientific knowledge and technological capacities within the most advanced economies and use the threat of cross-retaliatory sanctions against those that do not comply with TRIPS.

Outsourcing the provision of government services

A similar pro-active aim and achievement of the more industrialised countries in the Uruguay Round was the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Widening the definition of traded products to include services, participants in the multi-sectoral negotiations and cross-sectoral trade-offs now also have to open up their reserved national service sectors. In order, for example, to obtain 'concessions' in areas of immediate export interest to their economies, govern-



ments are under pressure to allow fuller and freer entry into their countries of giant global service companies in banking, insurance and accounting, transport and communications, information, advertising and entertainment. These, and a host of other service industries, together, now constitute a major proportion of the GNPs of the most developed countries, and require a commensurate and rapid expansion of their global role as well.

Countries of the South are lagging far behind in the competitive development of commercialised national service industries. These technical and social service sectors, such as public transport and housing, telecommunications, public broadcasting and television, culture and sports, education, health care, water provision and sanitation, are not merely commercial enterprises but essential components of national economic and social development strategies in the South. Such services are particularly necessary to the wellbeing and rights of the weakest sectors of our societies, above all women, children and the poorest.. Such essential services face ever-growing demands – and elaborate theoretical rationalisations – for their privatisation and accessibility to foreign acquisition, and/or competition from global service corporations in all these spheres. This has significant social, cultural and political, as well as economic, implications for poor people and for the public provision role of government.

Positive expectations – but imbalanced outcomes – for the countries of the South

It was not until the later phases of the prolonged Uruguay Round – and rather more so in the years that followed – that the full implications and the strategic purposes of the central WTO agreements gradually became evident to the developing countries that participated in the UR process. In this they were assisted by the revelations and analyses of close observers¹² and direct participants in the process¹³ on behalf of the developing countries,¹⁴ as well as active and highly effective non-governmental organisations, such as the Third World Network (TWN) operating from Malaysia. But, for much of the Uruguay Round, most of the developing country representatives were



little more than spectators of the ‘multilateral’, but more often plurilateral and bilateral, bargaining and agreements that were made by the most powerful developed countries¹⁵ .

Unequal power relations in global institutions

In part, the weak participation and influence of the countries of the South in the Uruguay Round was due to their lesser numbers,¹⁶ but more so owing to their limited experience in multilateral negotiations - although there were some exceptions, such as India. It was also attributable to their – understandable – failure to foresee the new strategic vision and thrust of the highly industrialised countries of the North. However, the developing countries also erred in approaching the UR negotiations ill prepared, with very limited objectives and usually making narrowly focused interventions in the discussions, if any at all.

With hindsight, the developing countries appear overly-reliant and too trustful in their expectations of the new round of negotiations. The countries of the South – or those that had clearly identified aims – calculated that the multilateral, multi-sectoral liberalisation negotiations of the UR could be an important opportunity to promote their specific interests and obtain positive responses to their long-standing grievances in the existing international trade regime. Their first aim was to end the exclusions and secure full access for their few globally competitive manufactured exports – mainly textiles and clothing – into the high consumer markets of the rich developed countries. The second concern was that their other important exports – from the agricultural sector – should be incorporated into GATT, which had hitherto only covered manufactured goods of interest to the more industrialised countries. In neither of these did the developing countries achieve their aims, except as longer term prospects into the new millennium.

The third motivation of many developing countries in going along with the highly unsatisfactory nature of the UR negotiations, and even in welcoming the establishment of the WTO at the end, was their optimistic ex-



pectation about the new ‘multilateral rules-based system’ for international trade and other economic relations that would be set in motion through the WTO. It was anticipated that this would, *inter alia*, bring to an end the unilateral measures and pressures, largely by the strongest governments against weaker – although also between the DCs themselves – that had long characterised international economic relations. Within the new multilateral framework of rules and regulations, all members would be able – and would be expected – to settle their trade and trade-related disagreements through the Dispute Settlement Undertaking (DSU) that emerged from the UR.

Uses, and abuses of the ‘multilateral rules-based system’ –by developed countries

The experience with the functioning of the DSU over the five years since the creation of the WTO, has certainly not been as positive as expected. The complexity of the issues and the procedures, and the capacity of stronger countries/companies to prolong the dispute panel processes means that weaker complainants can be irreparably damaged in the interim, even if the eventual WTO panel ruling is in their favour. Weaker countries are also manifestly reluctant to pursue official DS processes through the WTO – at one level due to their lack of legal expertise and the vast costs entailed in hiring international legal experts and researchers. At an underlying level, this caution is very probably also due to their apprehension (arising from wider experience) about possible indirect reprisals by their stronger adversaries, in other spheres and ways, should they institute formal proceedings against them. The utility or very feasibility of the imposition of WTO-authorized trade sanctions by weaker economies against strong economies graphically illustrates the formalistic nature – and fallaciousness – of the ‘equal rights and treatment of all members’ within the WTO.

Multilateral versus unilateral rules based system

The more general threat to the so-called ‘multilateral’ rules-based system is that some powerful governments – mainly, but not only the USA – continue to act unilaterally when it is considered necessary to protect or pro-



mote national economic and even political interests. Washington routinely applies its own 301 trade legislation to block or threaten other countries, and even resorts to extraterritorial enforcement of particular national economic laws to serve strategic US objectives.¹⁷ The US government is also noted for its energetic support to damaging anti-dumping actions by US companies and the imposition of countervailing measures against foreign imports when required to do so by domestic industries to protect them against allegedly 'unfair' competitors. This may be within the letter of the relevant WTO agreements, but goes against the spirit of the open, free trade, competitive global economy purportedly being promoted by the New World trade regime. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult for weaker countries lacking the necessary financial, legal, trade monitoring and industrial research facilities to institute their own anti-dumping actions against powerful economies such as the US and the EU, even where they possibly have a strong case.¹⁸

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

The US is not the only country to flout the letter and spirit of the new 'global multilateralism'. The more industrialised countries grouped together in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) attempted, through their own less-than-global multilateral negotiations, to create a new Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), outside of the WTO, for the full and unfettered operation of foreign investors and TNCs throughout the world. This strategy was effectively exposed and energetically opposed by a global alliance of civil society organisations, which succeeded in raising the public alarm and dividing the OECD governments, such that the French government officially withdrew its support and the process was suspended. Had this not happened, the MAI would have been presented, in form multilaterally but in essence unilaterally, to all the other countries seeking foreign investment. The EU, Japan and other governments, under continuing pressure from their global financial corporations and TNCs, are still aiming to get their (renamed) Multilateral Investment Agreement (MIA) integrated into and approved within the 'more fully multilat-



eral' and 'bottom up' processes of the WTO. However this, in turn, raises further critical questions with respect to the functioning of the WTO, *per se*.

In addition to the type of evasions illustrated above, the 'multilateral' nature of decision-making in the WTO, itself, has been most pervasively contradicted by the highly un-transparent, non-inclusive processes within the organisation, and the back-room deals between the most powerful countries which are then presented to the rest of the WTO membership as a *de facto* 'consensus' to be endorsed.¹⁹ Tactical alliances between smaller groups of like-minded countries, or those with specific interests in common, may be an intrinsic part of multilateral negotiations but, in the case of the WTO, the influence of specific groups of the more influential countries is reinforced by the marked susceptibility – and even the unofficial 'accountability' – of the WTO Director General and the Secretariat to the most powerful member states.²⁰ However, quite apart from this manifestation of global power politics, the more fundamental, structural bias of the WTO resides in the WTO Secretariat's 'impartial' application of the tendentious agreements already secured by those states, and the official, unproblematised endorsement and promotion by the WTO of the theories and assumptions of the global neo-liberal paradigm.²¹

Global economic governance: Impacts on women

The WTO Secretariat's accommodation to the most powerful states, is also evident in the prolonged failure of the organisation in the first five years of its existence to energetically pursue and secure the effective implementation of formal undertakings made by the most industrialised countries, for example to open up their markets to developing country exports in textiles and clothing. This is one of the few areas where millions of Third World women²² find waged employment. There is also marked tardiness by the DC's and WTO in implementing the assurances given to the lesser and least developed countries by the industrialised country governments in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round in Marrakech. The "Marrakech Ministerial Decision on Measures in Favour of Least Developed Countries", and "Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effect of the Agricultural Reform



Programme on Net Food Importing Countries” were the belated acknowledgement, by the main beneficiaries of the UR, of the marginalisation of the weaker countries and the predicted (or what they defined as the ‘possible’) prejudicial effects of the new global trade regime upon them. Once again, those who would be most seriously prejudiced would be the poorest sectors of the populations of the South, 70% of whom are female.

Contradictory and differential impacts

There are contradictory and differential impacts of globalisation for the gender division of labour. More women migrate in search of work, become commodities in the field of sex tourism and experience unrestrained violence. Another contradictory impact is the easy links/connections between the local and the global through information flows which create and expand the space for “rights based” work. But while strengthening civil society, it also gives room and provides an environment for the rise of narrow forms of fundamentalism. The gains attained by the women’s movement during the World Summit on Social Development and at Beijing are being eroded by the right wing backlash and fundamentalism which is emerging as narrow nationalism in opposition to globalisation. It has created conditions for “national” citizenship within patriarchal forms of government on the one hand, and, a universal, internationalist citizenship on the other.

The transition to democracy in South Africa is a case in point here. Since those who were previously excluded from political and economic processes constitute the black majority the push for a new type of democracy is emerging. The policy approach is one which, seeks to democratise both the economic and political processes. However, changing systems to promote participation and democracy is different from the promotion of dependent development paradigms. (*See box below*)

South Africa: Democracy and liberalisation

South Africa, caught between the euphoria of building a new democracy and the challenges posed by the dominance of neo liberal policies – is even more dangerously poised – because not only has it begun to privatise state services and assets but also



the process of policy making. While under the previous regime apartheid bureaucrats made policy and politicians sanctioned the policy without contesting it, politicians are now contesting policies that are made by foreign consultants. South Africa has had to engage in a rigorous public sector rationalisation process in line with structural adjustment programmes prescribed by external policy advisors. But the irony is that state spending has been redirected not to those who are most deprived (40% in absolute poverty), but to pay foreign consultants to write policy documents.

These documents are given the legitimacy of national content and flavour by incorporating mainstream NGO's and academic institutions as secondary partners in the process. Policies must appear before us at a speed that we think is necessary, but to get those policies crafted with technical efficiency, we have become complicit in redirecting state expenditure to where it is not needed. This makes a mockery of parliamentary democracy and substantive democracy particularly of elected officials in making policies that would restructure the state and that would redirect resources to those who need it most.

The marketisation of governance

The rolling back of the state in the form of deregulation from public interest to regulation in terms of private interests is a major cause for concern. How does this impact on women and poor people?

Free market policies have reorganised the state²³ according to some development proponents. With the privatisation of state assets and industries there appears to be less direct involvement of states in the production and distribution of goods and services. But alongside this has been the rise in new state regulations, subsidies and institutions which are designed with the intention of promoting an enabling environment for newly privatised industries. This has actually resulted within countries of the South in a new class structure and changes in internal social relations. A complex arrangement of interests is evolving with new elite's and traditional power blocs acting in what they purport to be the public interest.

Analysts on the left argue that the state has played and continues to play a role in promoting and implementing free market policies. Indeed the free market is said to need the protection of the state to maintain its



interests and ensure its power. Given that poor women operate largely outside of mainstream markets and that markets respond to needs backed by cash, the emerging state-market relationships perpetuate the exclusion of poor women from mainstream economic and social activity.

Key to the debates on the nature and role of state institutions in relation to dominant market forces is the objectives of state restructuring and / or reorganising. Current trends indicate that states are being reorganised to serve the interests of market forces and these interests do not coincide with those of the dispossessed. Moreover, the reality for poor women across countries reveals that the reorganising of the state bears little relation to the process of social transformation. That the power of the state is being eroded in relation to public interest is more and more evident, but shockingly the state and governance is being marketised and depoliticised under the guise of democracy.

Generally in the North and the South structural adjustment measures have been introduced in different ways. However we note the emergence of contradictory trends. While in the North, OECD countries' proportion of state spending relative to the economy has continued to grow, averaging 50% of GDP, in the South government spending has been cut back to just over 25% of GDP on average. Government spending has also been redirected in the South.

The efficiency imperative

The state continues to play a significant role in framing taxation policy, in monetary policy, directing subsidies to sectors of industry, outsourcing government contracts, awarding franchises for privatised industries etc. In the health, social and education sectors the emphasis is on the establishment of new state mechanisms to ensure market efficiency and discipline. At the same time there is an increase in initiatives within government and outside it to train, retrain and re-orient civil servants towards business plans and efficiency models. The redirecting of the state towards market efficiency on the one hand, has in some cases led to the enforcement or re-enforcing of repressive legislation and policing to contain and stamp out resistance to the economic violence inherent in the market.



The implication of the redirection of states towards market efficiency models and cutbacks on the social sector has placed an increasing burden on women. It has also resulted in the expansion of state policing and security measures to reinforce compliance and deal with the other social outcomes of social and economic marginalisation.

In India, for example, security forces have been increased to “deal” with internal dissent and to facilitate domestic capital or foreign exchange-bearing entrepreneurs”. Special units of Indian police are being trained by western security experts to “protect the life and property of foreign investors”. Similar trends emerge in Africa with a finely nuanced relationship developing between some African governments and private security firms or groups of mercenaries. South African based Executive Outcomes (a private military/security force) is being used by governments and others (like multinational firms).

The state may therefore, also be said to be complicit in the privatisation of security, forming compacts with those who have no public interest and are available to any side. What does this mean for women at a micro and macro level? Counter insurgency is used to enforce control and compliance, and as a result, democratic processes, accountability and transparency become expendable. The state can and in many instances is abrogating its responsibility for the security of its people as evidenced by the experiences of women in the South. Against this backdrop of global economic governance, the common and specific experiences of women in the South resonate with the pain of unfulfilled aspirations.

Globalisation and the state: Reflections on South Asian women’s experience²⁴

The pressure to globalise is not just a case of eroding the principles and goals of self-reliance in the region. On the one hand, the democratic foundations of sovereign nation states are challenged as they are pressured into submitting to the dictates of free-market ideology as espoused by the Bretton



Woods Institutions (BWI). And on the other, compliance has compromised the state's capacity to promote development.

Women in South Asia, form one of the most marginalised groups – indicators on health, education and nutrition point to serious disparities between men and women across all ages. The feminisation of poverty is quite rampant throughout South Asia with households headed by women on the increase and among the poorest.²⁵

More work opportunities with greater exploitation

Export led industrialisation created job-opportunities for women in enclaves, called the Free-Trade Zones (FTZs) where labour laws are waived. Sri-Lanka has over 100,000 women working in the FTZs and in 1992, the whole island was declared as a Free-trade Zone.²⁶ In Bangladesh, women constitute 80–90 per cent of the workers in the garment export industry and form four to five per cent of the active-age urban female population.²⁷ In India, the proportion of women working in FTZs is small compared to the total female workers in the manufacturing sector.

The Free-Trade Zone's policies for recruiting women show a mixed picture. Sri-Lanka's workers are mostly young and unmarried girls. India and Bangladesh show variations in age and marital status with a new layer of younger girls. In general, FTZs are characterised by women working for cheap wages, on a piece-rate basis, in substandard working conditions with a high degree of job-insecurity. The jobs are repetitive and monotonous and require concentration and nimble fingers – considered as “assets” of female workers but who are never valued as “skilled”. States and corporations collaborate in the exploitation of women.

Globalisation threatens livelihoods and food security

Recently, the focus has moved from the manufacturing to the agricultural sector.²⁸ The implications of this for societies in South Asia, is far-reaching. In the rural areas, land ownership is the main source of assured livelihoods for the people. Further, women constitute a large proportion of the agricultural work force. With globalisation, two common trends in the agriculture



sector have been observed in India and Bangladesh. One, is the state's withdrawal of subsidies from this sector. The second is the direct investment of TNCs in the sector – a fallout of which is changing the use of land for food crops to cash crops, a case in point is that of aquaculture, the cultivating of shrimps for exports.²⁹ Aquaculture raises issues on people's rights to sustainable livelihood and community rights over decision making in development activities.

The withdrawal of state subsidies

In Bangladesh, the major policy reforms in the agricultural sector included:

1. a gradual withdrawal of input subsidies, especially fertilisers
2. initiating a compensatory farm price support program
3. moving from publicly owned irrigation facilities that were available to farmers at subsidised rates to a privatisation of irrigation facilities. Subsidies were moved to purchase of tube wells and pumps, thereby restructuring the incentive pattern in irrigation. Predictably, these changes reflected in the government's outlay that declined considerably in just five years from 30 per cent in 1980–81 to 20 per cent in 1986–87. Prices of agricultural inputs rose faster than prices of paddy, making cultivation economically unviable. The resultant slowdown in agriculture production had adverse effects on small farmers and women, as the incidence of female-headed households is much higher among smaller farmers.³⁰

Direct intervention of transnational corporations

In both Bangladesh and India, food grain cultivation was discontinued because of the salinity of the land and where it continued, there was a drastic reduction. In India, women who performed most of the labour-intensive operations in Paddy cultivation were marginalised when aquaculture was introduced as piece-rate and contract work is the norm for hiring labour. Although cash wages increased, the number of days of wage work declined considerably.³¹

In Bangladesh, foreign labour was hired, increasing local unemployment. Aquaculture has affected an estimated 10 million people living in



the coastal areas. Food requirement, previously met by rice cultivation has to be met from the market. On the whole, aquaculture has resulted in destroying the agrarian economy of the region, threatened food-security of the poor and caused environmental damage.³²

Transnational corporations ignore environmental damage

Another result of export led aquaculture by TNCs is the irreversible degradation of the environment and the rise in social conflict within communities. Adverse effects on the ecosystem results in shortage of drinking water, food, wood-fuel and loss of common property. This further affects live-stock related activities. In Bangladesh, the health impacts of replacing food grains and local fish varieties with shrimp cultivation led to malnutrition, physical stunting and night blindness among poor children and people.

Cutbacks in food subsidies

The adoption of SAPs has also led to severe cutbacks or rolling back of food subsidies in the region. In Sri-Lanka, food stamps that provided subsidised food grains were withdrawn in the 80s. In India, very recently, an increase in prices of subsidised rations distributed through the Public Distribution System (PDS) has led to food prices that are only marginally lower than prices in the open-market. This makes food unavailable to people living below the poverty line. Such a situation, together with the cultural practice which dictates that, in Asian households women eat last, has led to increased starvation and malnutrition for them. Increased prices on food grains will further worsen the unequal allocation of food for women and girls exacerbating existing levels of malnutrition.

Women as commodities

Shrinking livelihood opportunities, results in the intensification of gendered and andro-centric divisions of labour. The steep rise in prostitution, trafficking of women, migrant domestic workers and informalisation of women's labour are a case in point. Sri-Lanka has the largest number of migrant women domestic workers to the gulf countries in South Asia.³³ The traf-



ficking of women from Nepal to Indian brothels is on the increase.³⁴ Governments' commitment to expand women's participation in the formal sector has not been realised. They have backtracked on this with the argument that the informal sector, particularly home-based production is more suitable for women. Currently 94% of women workers are in the informal sector. It is the only expanding avenue for income generation as a survival strategy for millions of families.

The Human Development Report (HDR) 1999 confirms the experiences of poor women in the South and shows that more progress has been made in the adoption of policies and the setting up of institutions to support global markets than to support people and their rights. Further, it reveals that the opening up of national economies have not resulted in benefits for countries in the South. In South Asia, feminists' question whether the shift towards "global economic strategies" creates new possibilities for human development in the context of the state's emphasis on cut backs and privatisation. Moreover, they challenge the logic of building democracy at grass-roots levels even as the nation state and democratic processes are destroyed from above and through global economic institutions.

Increased militarisation to create internal stability for globalisation

South Asia has become one of the most militarised regions in the world. Post the Cold War the region's defence budgets have increased. While these increases have not been significant in comparison to other countries in 1996 (refer to table 3.2), India and Pakistan have since increased their defence spending disproportionately in building up their nuclear capability. India and Pakistan arms budgets account for 93% of total military expenditure in the region.³⁵

South Asia is the only region in the world where military spending has gone up in proportion to Gross National Product (GNP). Who gains from this and who is interested in the continuation and escalation of the tension and rivalry between the two countries?



Table 3.2: Arms in figures					
A Military spending (% of GDP) 1994; B = Imports of conventional weapons (\$ millions/prices 1990) 1994					
	A	B		A	B
Angola	8.7		Laos	7.9	
Antigua	0.8		Lesotho	3.2	
Argentina	1.7		Madagascar	0.8	
Bangladesh	1.8	75	Malawi	1.1	
Barbados	0.5		Malaysia	3.9	
Benin	1.5		Mauritius	0.4	
Bolivia	1.4		Mexico	0.7	
Botswana	4.6		Mozambique	7.1	
Brunei	4.5		Namibia	2.2	
Burkina Faso	1.6		Nepal	1.1	
Burundi	3.0		Nicaragua	2.0	
Cambodia	2.3		Nigeria	3.1	
Cape Verde	0.9		Pakistan	6.9	819
Chile	3.5	263	Papua New Guinea	1.1	
Colombia	2.3		Paraguay	1.4	
Congo	1.7		Peru	1.8	
Costa Rica	0.5		Philippines	1.4	
Côte d'Ivoire	0.8		Rwanda	7.7	
Cuba	2.7		Senegal	2.2	
Ecuador	3.2		Sierra Leone	4.4	
El Salvador	1.9		Singapore	4.8	70
Fiji	1.5		South Africa	3.3	
Gambia	3.7		Sri Lanka	4.7	
Guatemala	1.1		Tanzania	3.5	
Guinea	1.2		Thailand	2.6	
Guinea-Bissau	3.3		Trinidad & Tobago	1.4	
Haiti	2.2		Uganda	2.4	
India	2.8	773	Uruguay	2.5	
Indonesia	1.4		Venezuela	1.6	147
Jamaica	0.9		Vietnam	5.7	
Korea Dem. Rep.	26.6	13	Zambia	1.0	
Korea Rep.	3.6	613	Zimbabwe	3.5	

Source: *The World Guide 1997/98: A View from the South*, Instituto del Tercer Mundo, Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd.

The only losers continue to be the poor. Increased military capability in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh provides and exacerbates armed intervention in internal politics. The availability of arms, increases the likelihood of governments using military solutions to resolve political and civil problems. Evidence also suggests that movements based on democracy with decentralised political structures have been taken over by “extremist” leadership that resorts to insurgency and “secessionist demands” in countries in the region. Sri Lankan women have experienced the horror of a sustained war and question increased militarisation in light of their everyday experiences.

Women’s position – some development indicators

Even though development is defined as a widening of options, globalisation offers, at

best, a very narrow range of choices for women and children in South Asia. There are more children out of school in South Asia than in the rest of the



world - 2/3 of them are female. The Gender Equality Measure (GEM) as indicated in the Human Development Report of 1999 is the lowest among all regions in the world. South Asia is the only region that defies the biological norm, with the ratio of women to men being 94–100. There is an alarming demographic shift in the juvenile sex ratio in India – in parts of North India the sex ratio is as low as 600 to 700 women per 1000 men. The Gender Development Index, (calculated as the difference between men and women of the extent of deprivation in education, health and income) is 0.41. This is 25% lower than the average for the developing world. The Gender Empowerment Measure (0.23) is the lowest in the world, including that of sub-Saharan Africa. This reflects the painful reality of women in South Asia-not only in relation to overwhelming poverty -but also in relation to their subordinate position in society.

The “population bomb” – patriarchal perceptions of women’s reproductive role

While the last global decade saw a focus on issues related to reproductive rights, the issue of the population ‘bomb’ remains caught in skewed perceptions - programmes on women’s health in official policy (either under family planning or later, family welfare) is geared to control women’s fertility. As far as hazardous contraceptives are concerned, the market ideology of “everything goes” prevails as long as control of women’s fertility can be achieved. Even though activists have managed to get a ban on some of these, women’s organisations are “unequally pitted” against the state and middle class perceptions of the poor as “surplus”. With the withdrawal of the state from its constitutional commitment to provide health and nutrition, the emphasis on “population control” rather than on population development is even more visible.

The “New Asia” Woman?

Working women in Asia are used and seen as an icon of a modern nation. Their integration into the global economy as professional or entrepreneur women, provide role models for the middle classes, as these women are



seen to have more choices within a free market context. Feminists in Asia, are concerned about the links between professional women's uncritical acceptance of the process of reforms, free market ideology and the overlap with modernity. In this context women are caught between increasing fundamentalist agendas and the opening up of occupational space which provides a modicum of "individual freedom".

The relationship between gender and modernity is being mediated through responses to globalisation. The impact of SAP's on women is well documented, (job insecurity, greater unemployment amongst women, deteriorating working conditions, increase wage differentials, declines in girls education, decrease in food and health resources, more women headed households and often survival through prostitution or sex work).

This situation is interpreted along class lines with women from slums and the poorest areas seen as promiscuous because they are forced into prostitution to survive while middle class women are perceived to be chaste and respectable.

Moreover the state's abdication of the role of governance increases the burden of poor women and scales off any possibility of development for social change. The state assumes that women's labour time is available as a reserve, subsidiary and complimentary source for capitalist economic development. Household burdens prevent women from emerging as permanent workers. Women are beginning to challenge the crucial link between their quality of life and the quality of governance in national regional and global contexts.

Understanding the paradox of globalisation: South East Asian women's experience³⁶

Given the subordinate roles and status of women, development outcomes have differential impacts on women and men. This affects their participation in family, community and national affairs. Globalising processes in the region, whether through international institutions or regional formations



are reinforcing women's subordination. South East Asian women's experiences reveal the extent of their exploitation and the ways in which their lives are reorganised to serve global economic agendas.

From Asian miracle to the world's financial debacle: The demystification of a model

The hardest hit in the Asian financial crisis in 1997 was, South East Asia (SEA). Made attractive to foreign investors by years of economic growth and proclaimed by the World Bank as an East Asian miracle, most of the SEA countries experienced unrestrained flows of financial capital in the early nineties. Benefiting from the accelerated development of communication and information technology, the global financial sector was able to move capital in quantity and speed unheard of in the eighties. Governments in the region, abetted by International Financial Institutions (IFI), set the conditions which virtually opened the floodgates for foreign investors. Such were the conditions that many governments were unable to intervene when global financial players decided to suddenly pull out massive amounts of capital in July 1997. This resulted in the dramatic fall of the Thai Baht, followed by the decline of the Indonesia Rupiah, the Malaysian Ringgit and the Philippine Peso.

The immediate cause of the crisis was attributed to, "foreign fund managers heading portfolio flows and in the second half of the nineties, the signs of a "herd mentality" that looked at the entire region as if it were homogenous when there were differences in economic fundamentals from country to country. This led to the "contagion effect" wherein currency depreciation and financial crisis in one country is transmitted to another country in the same region".³⁷ As events unfolded, it was clear that the crisis had not only affected the region but was in fact, becoming a global crisis.³⁸

Failures of governance (economic), especially in respect of South East Asia financial crises, have had consequences beyond 1998. Between 1998-2000 monetary losses were estimated at \$2 trillion. These are: $\pm 20\%$ of



global economic production in these years and more than the combined annual income of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and South Asia.³⁹

The crisis had varied impacts. In some countries, such as the Philippines and Indonesia the immediate impacts appeared to be limited however, long-term impacts are expected to show in lower quality of education and poor health conditions, in other words, a decline in quality of life, which could be more serious.⁴⁰ Low-income underdeveloped countries were less affected since they were insulated from the contagion. A survey on Philippine industry revealed that one third of the Filipino firms have reduced their number of employees in comparison to the 60% of the Thai firms and the 75% of South Korea.⁴¹

The boom-bust cycle of the Philippine economy meant unsustainable growth rates that did not make it as attractive to foreign investors as its neighbours hence the analysis that it was less affected by the crisis. The crisis of governance in Indonesia that followed the depreciation of the rupiah, revealed a far more divided nation. The government was unable to cope with an economic disaster alongside its ongoing conflicts and the popular uprisings in East Timor, Aceh and Irian Jaya. President Suharto had no option but to succumb to the conditions imposed by the IMF. In Malaysia, Prime Minister Mahathir, imposed a limit on the out flows of portfolio investment.

In Indonesia, for example, there were other impacts. Since the most affected sector was the male-dominated construction industry, more male workers were laid off. In contrast, the female dominated labour intensive export oriented sectors such as textile, garment and footwear industries were not as affected and figures indicate a growth of the female labour force. The same trend was detected in the informal sector, with an increase of 6.5% of female family workers in 1997 to 1998 compared to the years of 1986 up to 1996.⁴² While there were increases in the female work force women were pushed into more exploitative conditions of work as cheap labour to provide for families.



In Thailand, there was a marked rise in female commercial sex work. Feminists are concerned about the extent to which “women’s bodies get cast as a natural resource in international development strategies and the national policies generated to implement these strategies.”⁴³

At the international level, the crisis paved the way for greater control by agencies like the IMF. A rescue package by the IMF, amounting to US\$16 billion (later increased to 17.2) to Thailand was negotiated. The government could only access this loan if it followed certain conditionalities. These included, privatising public utilities such as telecommunications and energies, increasing fuel tax to help raise revenues and reforming a variety of laws to open up key economic sectors for more participation of foreign firms in the economy. Since the “IMF and the World Bank had been instrumental in promoting Thailand, with its openness to capital flows and its high growth rates, as a model of development for the rest of the Third World”⁴⁴ they had to prop it up as a model. In response to this massive bailout, one of the demands of the Assembly of Poor (AOP) a national level coalition of local people’s organisations, rural villages and women’s groups, was for the Thai government to make public the agreement and conditions attached to the bailout by the IMF.

The saga of the state amidst globalisation: A case of political restructuring?

The creation of a transnational system that blurs the boundaries between domestic and foreign trade forced nations are to change their view of themselves as world actors.⁴⁵ They are less effective in their exercise of power as it is restricted to geographical borders while the processes they are supposed to govern and the problems they are supposed to solve now have global dimensions.

South East Asian states have not asserted themselves enough in areas where it mattered. For example Bello explains that the lack of state intervention in financial markets allowed over investment in the property sector in South East Asia. What is needed is “effective regulation of the private



sector and in particular, the break up of corrupt patronage that links the public and private networks”. Furthermore there is a need to control capital inflows and outflows to prevent destabilising affects.⁴⁶ This view is consistent with the UNDP, as reflected in the Human Development Report, that states “Globalisation offers great opportunities for human advance – but only with stronger governance.”⁴⁷

States act to protect private interests

The importance of the state to globalisation is underscored by Ellen Wood (1997) when she writes, “in the global market, capital needs the state. It needs the state to maintain the conditions of accumulation, to preserve labour discipline, to enhance the mobility of capital while suppressing the mobility of labour. Behind every transnational corporation is a national base, which depends on its local state to sustain its viability and on the other states to give it access to other markets and other labour forces. In a way, the whole point of globalisation is that competition is not just or even mainly between individual firms but between national economies. And as a consequence, the nation-state has acquired new functions as an instrument of competition. If anything, the nation-state is the main agent of globalisation”.⁴⁸ The evidence in South East Asia shows that the most successful in implement neo-liberal goals are those states that are fundamentally authoritarian.

A different perspective is forwarded by Giddens (1998) who explains the three way movement of globalisation as it affects the position and power of states. According to him, “Globalisation ‘pulls away’ from the nation-state in the sense that some powers nations used to possess, including those that underlie Keynesian economic management, have been weakened. However globalisation also ‘pushes down’ – it creates new demands and also new possibilities for regenerating local identities. Globalisation also ‘squeezes sideways’ creating new economic and cultural regions that sometimes crosscut the boundaries of nation-states”. A look at the regional integration processes perhaps could be useful in substantiating the third element.



APEC: The regional governmental body at the forefront of liberalisation

Established in 1989 as a consultative forum, APEC's main concern is the creation of a region wide, liberalised trade and investment regime. In its 1991 Declaration, APEC committed "to enhance and promote the role of the private sector and the application of free market principles in maximising the benefits of the regional co-operation". By 1994, the APEC heads of state agreed to reduce existing trade and investment barriers by 2010 for the developed and 2020 for the developing countries.

Considered as a forum for regional economic agenda-setting through dialogue, in fact, APEC is coming up as the key institution for economic liberalisation in the Asia-Pacific region. As one of its objective is "to deepen and broaden "the liberalisation policiesspawnd by GATT-UR agreements, it is clear that the APEC agenda is no different from that of the WTO and GATT-UR.

In fact, APEC is only one element of an integrated system of agencies, institutions, groupings and enterprises that are committed to the goals of global free markets and free trade. It has links and overlapping membership with other international and sub-regional institutions (such as the IMF, NAFTA). While the different actors would have different views of how to arrive at these goals, APEC's core concept of open regionalism needs to be further scrutinised especially in the light that APEC is considered as the vanguard to push trade and investment liberalisation in the WTO further and faster.

Given the nature of APEC itself, there has been a lot of discussion among NGO's on whether it would be useful to get involved in the ongoing APEC processes. One view is that participation could lead to legitimation of anti-people initiatives of APEC. For this camp, it is more important to develop independent people- based strategies that could challenge APEC's lack of political and popular legitimacy, transparency and accountability from outside.⁴⁹

The other perspective is that it is most urgent to intervene in the processes so that one could influence outcomes to more pro-people activities.



Of course, the question women pose is how are NGO's to meaningfully participate in these processes. What are the mechanisms for participation of NGO's given the terms of reference of APEC itself? What kind of NGO's will participate? Will Southern NGO's have the same leverage as the Northern NGO's vis-a-vis their respective countries. How does one arrive at a consensus? How does one ensure accountability?

Women act against APEC

As far as women's organisations are concerned, three international women's conferences against APEC have been organised, Manila, 1996; Vancouver, 1997 and Kuala Lumpur, 1998 side by side with APEC meetings. While rejecting the APEC free market agenda of privatisation, deregulation and further trade liberalisation, the women who gathered in Vancouver called for more people to people co-operation. They also demanded that the governments allocate resources more effectively, stop demolitions, provide adequate employment, recognise women's roles and subsidise efforts for sustainable agriculture. In Kuala Lumpur, the women called for active resistance to globalisation in agriculture. They claim that transnational agribusiness corporations have taken over food production and distribution and in so doing, have further marginalised women's role in agriculture, and destroyed their knowledge and skills.⁵⁰

Globalisation and the state: Reflections on Latin American and Caribbean women's experience⁵¹

In Latin America women ask the question: what State for what development? The region experiences economic stagnation, increasing unemployment and a poorly qualified informal labour sector. Participation of women in the labour market has increased. International financial volatility, has affected the region, increasing social polarity, and the loss of ground at the international trade level. However, intra-regional trade is increasing through sub-regional blocs. But there is also a parallel increasing alienation of na-



tional economies, a contraction of national productive capacity and an unsustainable use of natural resources. Besides, with the emergence of centres of power, mainly paramilitary forces and mafias, the accountability and legitimisation of political power is being questioned by citizens, who experience a sense of desolation and insecurity in the region.

Structural adjustment measures were introduced in the region by the IMF and World Bank. These measures include:

- Search for macroeconomic stability, liberalisation of markets and deregulation of economic activity; cuts of public investment in order to eradicate deficits carried by the governments, regardless the high social cost.
- Reduction of State activity, through the privatisation of State enterprises; reduction of taxes for the most productive sectors and in some cases, efforts were made to improve the collection of taxes but with poor results because, it was not directed at corporations.
- The promotion of individual private property, rights as a legislative requirement
- Flexible labour markets with derogation of those labour laws that tackled the responsibilities of the employers. This was understood in the region as a means of undermining the power of unions and other labour organisations.

Contradictory impacts for women

However, certain countries are able to sustain some kind of dynamic growth such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Belice, and some islands in the Anglophone Caribbean region, Dominican Republic , Colombia and Chile, though the financial crisis also affected the markets of the latter. But, according to ECLAC, the sustained financial crises in the region are the clearest evidence of the huge asymmetry that exists in the world. Moreover, policies of structural adjustment have not been able to promote a process of growth and accumulation nor have they paved the way for sustainable development. On the contrary SAPs have:



- Promoted uneven access to resources and reproduced existing inequities;
- Lacked a gender perspective and in most cases assumed a neutral position.

Significantly in all cases, with the exception of Haiti and those countries with large indigenous populations, women have more access to secondary level education compared to men of the same age. While this is a positive indication, there are major disparities in opportunities for indigenous people. Indicators of human development, especially in education show that Uruguay, Argentina and Cuba have better access to secondary level education. Riviera points to the complex features of globalisation that require a synergy at different levels and co-ordinated action between different actors. The role of the state should be one of regulating the market, strengthening civil society and monitoring the different actors in development.

Globalisation processes as mediated through SAPs have not resulted in gains for women or poor people. However, in some cases the push for constitutional rights has led to certain reforms. These reforms have a contradictory impact on women's rights, since they promote progress on certain issues that were internationally agreed, which do not imply any public expenditure, but at the same time gender differences still persist and discriminatory norms tend to eliminate those rights that were already achieved, specially affecting the labour field.

Globalisation is not something new in the Caribbean either. It is marked by a history of colonialism that started in the Caribbean region and moved to the rest of Latin America, building the basis for capitalist expansion. Slavery and colonialism remain a painful part of Caribbean history. Feminist analyses in the Caribbean also highlight the need to critique globalisation and its impacts on women.

Feminists from the anglophone Caribbean have worked for the establishment of women's bureaux, and have had experiences of working with the State. Despite this discriminatory practices persist, and continue to be the centre of struggle.⁵² However an increasing number of people justify



their right to participate at Government level. The NGO's movement has been able to critique the market and trade agreements that undermine people.

Globalisation and the state: Reflections on African women's experience

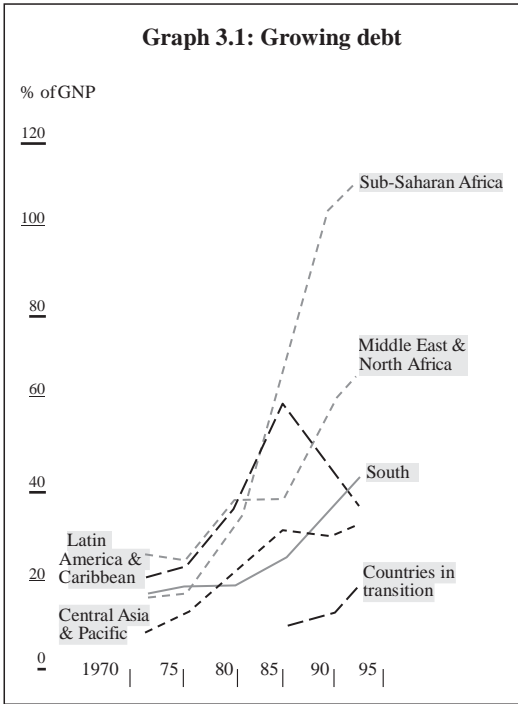
Globalisation, structural adjustment programs and debt⁵³

The sharp oil price rises of the 1970s accompanied by the decrease in the market value of export products from Africa made it impossible for most countries in this region to service their debts. Sub Saharan Africa, has the highest debt and servicing obligations, amounting to over 100% of GNP for the region (refer to graph3.1). Africa's debt servicing has had a direct impact on its ability to promote human development. The lending organisations, namely the World Bank and the IMF, have instituted economic SAPs with specific prescriptions for debtor nations to adjust their economies to service their loans. Graph 3.1 shows the extent to which debt is an overwhelming problem for the South. It particularly highlights the unsustainable nature of debt servicing for sub-Saharan Africa. Africa's debt crisis has had a devastating impact on poverty in the region. Under SAPs, debtor nations were forced to devalue their national currency, slash their budget deficit through cutting subsidies and social services. Further, retrenching public employees, introducing price controls, broadening the tax base, removing ceilings on interest rates and promoting the export sector were part of the conditions. In addition, government businesses were to be privatised. African women emphasised the many processes of globalisation, and focused on the deregulation of markets under SAPs and the subsequent decline of the power of the nation state as having a significant impact on their lives.

Economic, political, and social issues in Africa

Three related processes have taken place in the 1990s and these are liberalisation, democratisation and globalisation.⁵⁴ The two processes of globalisation and liberalisation are linked.⁵⁵ One significant change in the





Note: In the Sub-Saharan Africa data, South Africa is not included.

Source: World Bank, *World Debt Tables 1994–95*, Vol. 2. Washington, DC, 1994. in *The World Guide 1997/98: A View from the South*, Instituto del Tercer Mundo. Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd.

assumed to be the key to economic and social development.

African feminist critiques of globalisation

It is worth recalling first that, as observed by Sparr,⁵⁷ neoclassical economics is not a value-neutral science. Globalisation is a reflection of cumulative cultural and historical processes that are specific interpretations of human behaviour seen through the lens of a particular race, class and gender of

nature of international capital in the 1990s is that it has moved from “on-shore” and is now located “offshore”. The powerful electronic means of moving capital increases the speed of capital transaction around the world, making it difficult for the nation state to apply regulations or impose taxation. According to Pereira,⁵⁶ the international financial institutions use good governance for the purpose of rhetoric, when in reality their aim/agenda is the promotion of the private market which is as-



thinkers. For instance, it places emphasis on atomistic rationality and negates co-operative solutions and thus, it is inevitable that mainstream economics tend to neglect state interventions. Yet in many countries there is a need for state intervention on behalf of citizens.

Second, the liberal theory is a-historical in the sense that it is grounded in the experience of a handful of industrialised economies at a particular point in time. It assumes that the nature of the economy will not fundamentally change and the difference between societies is negligible. One consequence of this a-historical conception and approach is that the theory assumes a fully monetised and market-oriented society. This explains why generic SAPs are prescribed for all debtor nations.

There is a major flaw in these monetised and market-driven presuppositions that affect women. Indeed, in many countries women provide products, labour and services as part of family obligations, reciprocal household responsibilities, mutual aid and the like. Further, this theory considers work performed, services rendered and products made that do not have an explicit price to have no economic value. Thus, much of what society classifies, as women's work is rendered invisible and unimportant for understanding how economics works. This means that the application of the African ethos of reciprocal obligations is overlooked and ignored in economic and livelihood analysis.

Third, policy-makers have assumed that women's unpaid work is infinitely flexible and free –regardless of how resources are allocated. As a result, women end up taking extra loads without relinquishing previous ones and thus feel the impact physically and emotionally. Finally, labour is not as freely available as neoclassical theory assumes. Laws, institutionalised practices and customs restrict women's chances for free market entrance, exit, and mobility.

Under agri-industrialization, TNCs play a key role in financing production, distribution, marketing and consumption of agricultural products. They control agriculture through processes of contracting with small-scale farmers, provision of technological packaging and imposing international



control over quality and variety for local products. Due to the fact that control lies with TNCs, the growth of agri-industries requires a review of the role and identities of farmers and the state as traditional actors in agricultural production. Previously, farmers used to be perceived as autonomous producers. But “the ethnography of agri-industrialisation demonstrates how the production activities of seemingly autonomous small producers are shaped less by their own decisions than by the sociology, economics and technology of production and consumption far from the sites where they actually produce”.⁵⁸ TNCs give preference to businesses that are free of government controls. Seen in this light, the power of farmers and government to act against TNCs is limited. But feminists may identify the globalisation threat to national and individual action as a space for strategies for gender transformation.

Feminist liberal theory has also come under serious attack for homogenising women. It is obvious that lived experiences of women vary due to a variety of factors such as race, class, and ethnicity. Socialist feminists have sought an answer in patriarchy, to support the idea that women’s subordination to men is universal. Nonetheless this does not address the problem, for there is still no common political agenda for all women.

Globalisation, the state and gender: A Pacific regional perspective⁵⁹

Globalisation in the Pacific region usually refers to the SAPs that most countries have adopted in one form or another, as they, in turn, became affected by the fallout from the world economic recession. Their economies were cushioned to a certain extent by the continuing high level of aid and the subsidised prices their primary commodities enjoyed in preferential trade agreements with their former colonial masters. Moreover a high percentage of the population is still involved in subsistence production which in many ways is less affected by fluctuating world markets.



But the continuing world economic crises and the adoption of austerity measures at home, which included retrenchments in their aid programmes, forced traditional donor nations to the Pacific not only to reassess their aid programmes but to impose conditions on their assistance, such as good governance, greater accountability and transparency. Such conditions were prompted partly by the demand from their own tax payers for greater accountability of aid funds, partly in support of World Bank and IMF neo-liberal economic and ideological stances and partly to encourage economic growth, which would render the Pacific region a better investment risk and a more lucrative market for their goods and services.

Thus, most Pacific countries were obliged by economic crisis to introduce structural adjustment policies designed to overcome trade or fiscal imbalances and to reduce inflation. Through the influence of aid donors, the World Bank and IMF, Pacific countries have embraced to various degrees the neo-liberal call for free markets and free trade, diversified export-led growth, foreign investments, downsizing of government, and lower public expenditure among many other aspects. Slatter⁶⁰ clearly documented numerous examples from around the region of the kinds of economic policies Pacific countries have adopted in response to pressures from the World Bank and IMF.

Privatisation of public enterprises and cutbacks

Privatisation programmes saw the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa, among others, selling off or corporatising state-owned enterprises to private interests. Fiji implemented a number of other prescribed policies, 'including cutting back on public spending (which has meant reduced allocations to health, education, housing and other social services); introducing a 'user pays' principle (which has raised the costs of public housing, health and education); and applying taxation 'reforms' aimed at broadening the tax base, providing incentives for private investment and reducing or eliminating trade-inhibiting taxes (import duties).



Tax reform transfers the costs to the poor

In both Fiji and Samoa, taxation 'reform' has been introduced in the face of strong public opposition, including a massive public demonstration in the case of the latter, and has transferred the tax burden onto the poor. Both countries have also embarked on new export-oriented manufacturing ventures (garments in Fiji and automotive wire assembly in Western Samoa for example) based on generous tax incentives to investors and the unmitigated exploitation of unorganised (and mainly female) workers.

Labour market deregulation

Economic and labour market deregulation in Fiji also entailed the additional imposition of repressive anti-labour decrees which strip workers and unions of hard-won rights and openly favour employers.⁶¹ Police records show that 'violence against women remains a dominant concern' and that 'increased hardship has been placed on women as the loss of income coupled with the introduction of some user charges have combined to put more pressure on them to manage family budgets. There has been a significant move back to traditional labour intensive methods of housekeeping in an effort to stretch household budgets. Financial pressures and the adoption of more labour-intensive household practices have reduced their ability to contribute to their communities and to care for their extended families.' Similar reports have emerged from other parts of the Pacific. Lateef,⁶² for instance, declared that 'while development has brought benefits to some Solomon Islanders, these benefits have not been shared or distributed equally. Women have certainly not been the major beneficiaries.

Natural resource extraction and depletion

In the striving for development, increased emphasis has been placed on the need for expanding the productive base of the country and its entry into the cash economy. This has meant for the Solomon Islands, the introduction and emphasis on cash cropping and the exploitation of resources, such as forests. Since the vast majority of the population still lives in rural villages practising subsistence agriculture, the introduction of cash crop-



ping and the logging of forests have, in many instances, created new and exacerbated existing problems for women.

The already long distances (often uphill) that women had to walk to collect and carry water and firewood have, in some cases, been lengthened since traditional sources of fuel wood and water have now either disappeared, or become polluted due to indiscriminate logging. The use of the best land closest to the village for cash crops has meant that women now have to walk further to their food gardens and work harder to produce the same quality and yield of food. The introduction of livestock projects either led to the livestock roaming and ruining women's food gardens' or increasing their workload by assuming responsibility for raising the livestock as the men neglect their responsibilities. 'The rush by many males to reap the cash rewards from logging and mining has meant that customary land has been signed away to outsiders (foreign companies) without any, or proper consultation with women, even when many have had customary rights to use of the land.'⁶³

Women's exclusion from development planning

The marginalisation of women in national planning economic strategies is common throughout the region, even in areas where women in many Pacific countries have traditionally played and are still playing major roles, such as in agriculture and fisheries. Emberson-Bain,⁶⁴ writing of Kiribati said that 'the important role of women in the fisheries sector – both in subsistence and commercial-artisanal activities – has yet to be given appropriate official recognition, support and resources in Kiribati. National policy has traditionally focused on such things as pelagic male fisheries and improving financial returns from resource exploitation within the country's 200-mile exclusive zone (EEZ). Today, the gender blind spot on fisheries development continues to be typified by marginalisation of women from sectoral planning and policy-making, training opportunities, access to credit and other crucial support services. This is inimical to the interests of national development as well as to women.'



Slatter⁶⁵ stated that ‘the negative impacts and/or questionable aspects of economic restructuring in the region are tangible enough to warrant concern and serious questioning.’ She went on to provide many examples from the region:

- In Fiji restructuring policies have created low-wage boom industries based on female labour, frozen or driven down wages in other industries and sectors and, through devaluation and the introduction of VAT generally eroded workers’ purchasing power. Corporatisation programmes have involved job losses for hundreds of nationals and huge consultancy gains for foreign companies.
- In Solomon Islands the reforms are considered to have contributed to triggering inter-ethnic tensions on Guadalcanal – reeling from the impact of the Asian crisis and especially the financial problems of Malaysian logging companies which saw the reduction of national income and fiercer competition for jobs, the Solomons Islands government was pressed by aid donors to cut expenditure, freeze wages and step up the promotion of private investment (Asia Times 22 July 1999).
- In the Marshall Islands, public sector reforms have reduced the government workforce by a third, imposed a three years wage freeze and frozen increments in the public sector. Budget cutbacks in public sector spending have axed training and income-generating activities formerly provided by the Division of Women within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Social Welfare. The women’s Division now functions merely as a clearing-house and meeting station for the National Council of Women and Other NGOs.⁶⁶

Globalisation is more than economic control

But globalisation in the region is not merely to do with neo-liberal economic policies, although that is the form it has largely assumed in the region. Pressure to reform political structures and systems have also come from external sources particularly from aid donors, which takes the guise of ‘good governance, transparency, accountability and democratic reform’.



As Kelsey⁶⁷ previously pointed out, it is not only goods and capital that traverse national boundaries. Services and ideas are included and governments are pressured to adopt policies that would allow deregulation and facilitate their ‘free’ movements and establish legal systems and institutions that would ensure that such policies are adopted and adhered to and once commitments are made through international agreements, countries would find it almost impossible to opt out of them and would be made to pay heavily in terms of crippling economic sanctions if they do so.

Many women’s non-government organisations from the Pacific, rejected the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) for ‘regional trade liberalisation and other mechanisms for economic globalisation’ because these processes put corporate profits as the overriding priority, while marginalising or even neglecting people’s needs and the environment. “Pacific Islanders, many of whom still own their lands and resources, are in a position to promote alternative systems of trade. Pacific peoples are choosing models of sustainable development that can remind communities in other parts of the world that there are viable alternatives to APEC”.⁶⁸

Some conclusions

The WTO, World Bank and IMF came under attack at Seattle by a broad coalition of progressive forces. Activism at Seattle centred on a world trade regime that is unaccountable and opaque. The demands from highly indebted poor countries for debt cancellation, for inclusion on equal terms within global governance institutions, for transparency and accountability are an integral part of the struggle for democracy and equity. In order to change the rules that govern economic global and regional institutions women are beginning to understand these rules and find spaces from within and without to expose the contradictions, the hypocrisy and brutality inherent in systems that are anti people and anti women.

The experiences of women in the south and feminist analyses indicate that “the relentless pressures of global competition are squeezing out care,



the invisible heart of human development”⁶⁹. Across all regions of the South women highlight the need for national, regional and global governance to be reconstituted in ways that centre gender justice and social equity. The current path of globalisation and the marketisation of governance is unsustainable. It poses a challenge to the feminist movement and progressive organisations of civil society to reclaim governance for social transformation. Global political space provides an opportunity for the feminist movement to mobilise on issues such as human rights, democracy and social transformation.

Notes

- 1 Commitment 8: The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action—World Summit for Social Development – 06–12 March 1995
- 2 Commitment 10: The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action—World Summit for Social Development – 06–12 March 1995
- 3 UNDP, Human Development Report,1999:1, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- 4 This section draws from a paper prepared by Dot Keet (2000) for DAWN’s PRST Inter Regional Meeting, Cape Town
- 5 Keet,1 997
- 6 [Onimode, 1992]
- 7 World Bank, 1991
- 8 As many were to become – in some views by deliberate design – in the aftermath of the ‘Asian’ financial crisis in the later years of the 1990s.
- 9 Such as the need for rules of the game on mutual liberalisation between the most industrialised countries themselves, and conditions for ‘fair’ competition between their global corporations.
- 10 Which had been sustained for almost twenty years through the repeated extension of the restrictive Multifibre Agreement (MFA).
- 11 It is still not clear whether they will accede to, or continue to evade, agricultural trade liberalisation in the multilateral agricultural negotiations that were postponed to the beginning of 2000.
- 12 [Raghavan, 1990]
- 13 [Shahin, 1996 ; Das, 1998, 1998a]
- 14 The former a negotiator in the WTO on behalf of Egypt, and the latter on behalf of India during the UR.



- 15 Very often in the controversial Green Room negotiations between the most powerful players that explicitly excluded 'outsiders'.
- 16 Although, with the rapid accession of developing countries to GATT during the UR, their numbers actually surpassed that of the OECD members when the WTO came to be officially launched in 1994.
- 17 As in Washington's threats of sanctions against countries/companies not observing US economic measures against Cuba and other countries considered hostile to US interests.
- 18 As has been argued with respect to the 'dumping' of EU agricultural products in developing countries' markets, because the Common Agricultural Programme (CAP) subsidies distort and probably disguise the real costs of production. The same applies to the (more covert) government subsidies given to US agriculture.
- 19 Khor, 1999
- 20 As with directors of the Bretton Woods Institutions, the US and the EU were absolutely adamant that the first Director General of the WTO should be a man enjoying their confidence and endorsement. And the quad put up an energetic resistance throughout 1999 to the appointment of a new Director General from a developing country (Thailand), and secured a compromise/interim candidate of their choice (from New Zealand)
- 21 WTO, 1996.
- 22 Although also children; and all of them invariably under appalling conditions.
- 24 This section is based on Vanita Mukherjee's, 2000, DAWN's Regional Synthesis PRST Paper on South Asia as well as Indu Agnihoti ', 1999. Paper on Globalisation and the State prepared for the DAWN PRST research process, South Asia
- 25 See IAWS, 1993
- 26 See The Island, 20/5/99
- 27 See Mahmud S, and Mahmud W, 1989
- 28 Overall, worldwide, the first wave of globalisation of agricultural policies coincides with SAP's that nearly 80 developing countries had to conform with as part of meeting conditionalities for rescheduling their external debt
- 29 See Mahmud S & Mahmud W, 1989, Agnihotri I, 1999
- 30 See Mahmud S & Mahmud W, 1989.
- 31 Barraclough S, and Finger-Stitch A. 1995
- 32 Ahmed N, 1995 cites loss of agriculture production to be 30% of previous production, loss of fishery as 100%, Loss of livestock and poultry – by 75%, shortage of fuel, fuelwood, biomass and crop residues. Salinity of soil affected



- dwelling like mud-houses that crumble. People living close to shrimp ponds were vulnerable to water-borne diseases. Shortage of drinking water, meant women had to walk a long way to get water.
- 33 From debates the South Asian Caucus, See Chiang Mai, 1999
- 34 Renu Rajbhandari raised this point at the first South Asia Workshop on PRST in Bangalore, India 1998.
- 35 World Bank Report as quoted by Dr. Indu Agnihotri in her paper.
- 36 This section is based on Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo's paper (2000) on Globalisation and the State in South East Asia, prepared for the DAWN PRST research process
- 37 Lim, 1998
- 38 Sta Ana, 1998
- 39 As stated in the HDR 1999
- 40 Lim, 1998 and Feridhanusetyawan (1999).
- 41 World Bank, 1999.
- 42 Feridhanusetyawan (1999).
- 43 Bishop and Robinson (1998)
- 44 Bello et al, 1998:43
- 45 Habermas 1998
- 46 Bello, 1998
- 47 UNDP – Human Development Report 1999:1
- 48 Ellenwood 1997 as quoted in paper prepared by Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo
- 49 www.vcn.ca/canada.summit
- 50 (Prakash and Mourin, 1998)
- 51 This section draws on Marcia Riveiera's (1999) DAWN PRST paper on The State and Globalisation in Latin America, Rio de Janeiro.
- 52 Linette Vassall, DAWN Caribbean participant at the PRST Meeting in Rio de Janeiro
- 53 This section is based on the Africa PRST Synthesis Paper by Assie-Lumumba (2000) and Collen Seegobin (1999), DAWN Africa PRST meeting, Cape Town
- 54 As debated by Collen Seegobin, (1999), Pereira (1999) and Taylor (1999) at DAWN Africa PRST meeting, Cape Town
- 55 Collen Seegobin (1999), DAWN Africa PRST meeting, Cape Town
- 56 Pereira (1999), DAWN Africa PRST meeting, Cape Town
- 57 Sparr, 1994:154
- 58 Kearney, 1996: 128
- 59 Drawn from Ana Maui Tankemlmugaki (2000), regional PRST synthesis paper on the Pacific
- 60 Slatter (1994; 2000)



- 61 Slatter (1994:21)
- 62 Lateef (1990:48)
- 63 Lateef (1990:48)
- 64 Emberson-Bain (1995:xiv)
- 65 Slatter, 2000
- 66 Wichman (1998:32)
- 67 Kelsey (2000)
- 68 Indigenous Woman, 1997: 45
- 69 UNDP, Human Development Report, 1999:7



Chapter 4: PRST

Institutionalisation of gender: Co-option and accommodation¹

“We commit ourselves to promoting full respect for human dignity and to achieving equality and equity between women and men, and to recognising and enhancing the participation and leadership roles of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life and in development.”²

Introduction

The series of United Nations World Conferences in the nineties on the Environment (Rio), on Human Rights (Vienna) on Social Development (Copenhagen) and on Population (Cairo) focussed on issues of women’s advancement and empowerment. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 was the culmination of many strands of women’s activism in a process of protracted negotiations, for action on these issues. Governments of the world agreed on the Beijing Platform for Action as an attempt to address some of the inequalities and injustices women face the world over.

Since the declaration of the Women’s Decade (1976-85), many states have put into place specific institutions such as Women’s Ministries and Women’s Bureaux and ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The UN Secretary-General’s report before the Commission on the Status of Women (43rd session March 1999) enumerated the problems that have plagued national machineries since 1975:



- they are positioned marginally in government's bureaucratic structure and have little influence on the overall policy-making process
- they have no clear mandate
- they are not linked up with NGOs
- they are not linked to line ministries in the government structure
- they lack support on gender mainstreaming from government officials and parliamentarians, with the latter assuming that gender is not relevant in such areas as the economy, defence, and energy policy
- there are difficulties in combining policy-advisory functions and actual programme implementation
- personnel lack know-how and training on gender issues
- lack of funds³

As can be seen from table 4.1 overleaf (Indicators of women in high-level jobs in some selected countries in the South) women have not been able to make significant entries into management echelons, however in the professional and technical levels the gains are slightly higher. This confirms critical feminist views that institutionalising women into state structures result in benefits for the middle classes. However, even within the professional sphere, middle class women still earn far less than their male counterparts.

Representation and institutionalisation does not lead to social transformation

The participation of women in politics and government bureaucracies has not led to a significant shift in the balance of power between men and women. Women's participation in structures, either national machinery or government, must be backed by critical feminist consciousness if it is to promote social transformation. Indeed the constant engagement with a critical mass of women outside and inside structures of governance is crucial.

Feminists have raised the problematic relationship of women to the state, and question changes that are touted as part of gender-equitable development processes. They have argued that the state must be viewed as an



institution where male privileges remain deeply embedded. These cannot be addressed by the mere integration of women into the sphere of politics and the bureaucracy. Feminists also question the argument that conflates female representation with the idea that this will result in feminist decisions and policies. The one does not automatically lead to the other, not just because individual women in the institutions of state cannot all be assumed to be concerned with gender equity, but because of institutionalised resistance to gender equity within the apparatus of governance.

Table 4.1: Indicators of women in high level jobs in some selected countries in the South (1995)

A = % administration and managerial posts occupied; B = % professional and technical women; C = Salaries of women as a percentage of men's income

	A	B	C		A	B	C
Bangladesh	5.1	23.1	23	Malaysia	11.9	44.5	29
Bolivia	16.8	41.9	17	Maldives	14.0	34.6	17
Botswana	36.1	61.4	29	Mauritania	7.7	20.7	18
Brazil	17.3	57.2	29	Mauritius	14.3	41.4	25
Burkina Faso	13.5	25.8	40	Mexico	20.0	43.6	24
Burundi	13.4	30.4	42	Mozambique	11.3	20.4	42
Cameroon	10.1	24.4	30	Namibia	20.8	40.9	19
Cape Verde	23.3	48.4	32	Nigeria	5.5	26.0	30
Central African Rep.	9.0	18.9	39	Pakistan	3.4	20.1	19
Chile	17.4	34.0	21	Papua New Guinea	11.6	29.5	35
Colombia	27.2	41.8	32	Peru	20.0	41.1	22
Costa Rica	21.1	44.9	26	Philippines	33.7	62.7	30
Cuba	18.5	47.8	30	Rwanda	8.2	32.1	41
Ecuador	31.5	48.0	17	Singapore	34.3	16.1	31
El Salvador	25.3	44.5	26	Solomon	2.6	27.4	30
Fiji	9.6	44.7	18	South Africa	17.4	46.7	30
Ghana	8.8	35.7	32	Sri Lanka	16.9	24.5	33
Guatemala	32.4	45.2	19	Sudan	2.4	28.8	21
Haiti	32.6	39.3	36	Thailand	21.8	52.4	37
India	2.3	20.5	25	Togo	7.9	21.2	32
Indonesia	6.6	40.8	32	Trinidad & Tobago	23.3	53.3	28
Lesotho	33.4	56.6	30	Uruguay	25.3	62.6	32
Malawi	4.8	34.7	33	Zambia	6.1	31.9	25
Source: <i>The World Guide 1997/98: A View from the South</i> , Instituto del Tercer Mundo, Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd.				Zimbabwe	15.4	40.0	27



The family as a site of struggle: Limits to institutionalisation

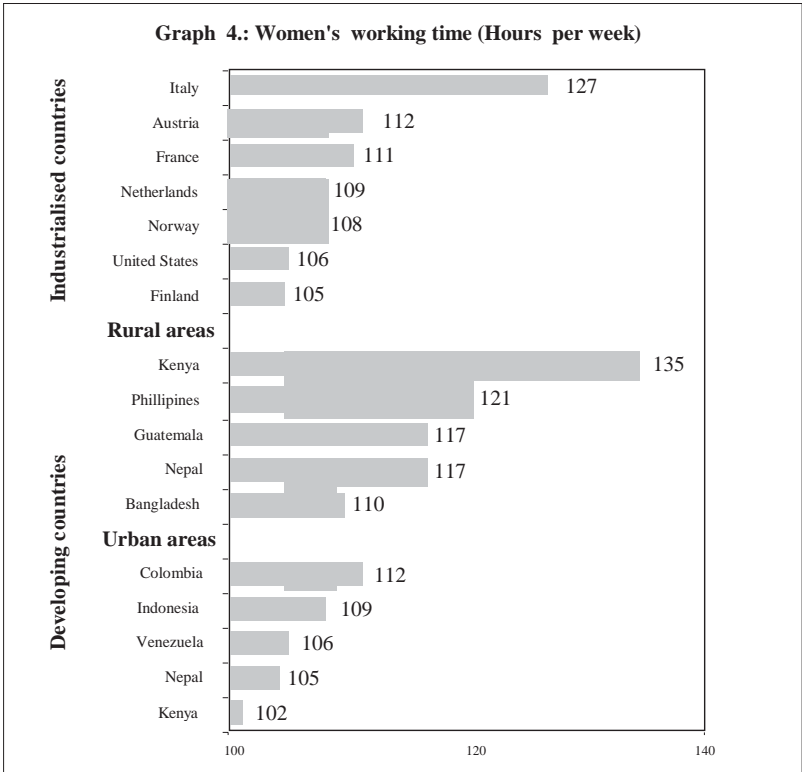
While there is a diversity of views among feminists on the degree to which the state oppresses women, they converge in viewing the family as the core site of women's oppression. For it is the family that defines the dividing line between the public and the private domains; that is, the boundary of state interference in individual existence. Thus, it is in policy towards the family in which the state intervenes (or not!) most powerfully in the lives of women regardless of political systems. State policy towards women within the family, however, is highly complex, because it is not unidirectional. It varies depending on its purpose, alternatively and sometimes simultaneously controlling and supporting women.

It follows that policy-making which addresses strategic and practical gender needs, is an important area for intervention. While both needs complement each other, there is recognition that by addressing strategic gender needs, women can achieve greater equality, in the process changing existing roles and challenging women's subordinate position.

The call for women to become visible in politics, traditionally a male domain, is one step towards challenging women's subordinate position. But even as there is some increased visibility of women in the public domain, the unequal terms on which women and men enter the public domain has been downplayed by the state. The situation has not significantly changed in the private sphere. The vast majority of women are still overburdened by reproductive duties that have not been equally shared by men. Indeed women are expected to share the burden of addressing both productive and reproductive roles. The hours women work are more than double the normal working hours per week posing extreme hardship on women and also limits to how they can engage in state structures (refer to graph 4.1 on the following page). Nonetheless, as one feminist observed, it is not the presence of women in politics that have made them stand out, but rather it is their absence in a male-dominated field.

Likewise, "training women in marketable skills and abilities will not give them the same degree of agency as men in the public domain as long





as public institutions do not accommodate the different bodies, needs and values that they bring to the workplace. Gender equity thus goes beyond equal opportunity; it requires the transformation of the basic rules, hierarchies and practices of public institutions.”

Development agencies: The reality gap

“Clearly the official agencies of development, both within national machineries and at the international level, have the resources and social weight to play an important role in implementing this



broader vision of gender equity. However to what extent can institutions that have systematically displayed prejudiced and stereotyped views about women be relied upon to implement the goals of gender equity? There has now been sufficient research into these issues to suggest that the institutions responsible for development planning and administration are not exempt from the gendered processes identified in the public domain at large.

Bureaucracies do not passively reflect the values of the wider society, but are actors in their own right, with a stake in upholding the hierarchical organisation of gender. Research into gender relations within bureaucratic organisations suggests that, despite differences in the cultures in which they are located, and the resources which they command, there is a remarkable similarity in the way in which bureaucratic rules and practices actively reconstitute gender hierarchy. Women and men are positioned differently and unequally both as the agents of policy administration and as subjects of policy attention. There are few women at the top level of decision-making within policy to transform this state of affairs, and even fewer who are willing to challenge dominant agency practice. Consequently, even organisations that have adopted goals of gender equity have frequently failed to implement them.”⁴

Government: Rhetoric and instrumental use of women

Women’s groups view governments’ pronouncements of commitment to gender equity and closing the gender gap with cynicism and suspicion. Government institutions often equate gender equity with providing access and opportunities for women to participate in the production of goods and services that can contribute to the country’s GNP, trade and dollar reserves. It is also equated with efficiency and welfare issues as improved education or health will enable women to perform better in the productive sphere and function well in their reproductive roles. As such these programmes benefit society at large.

Such orientation conflicts with the rights-based feminist view of gender equity that does not need to be justified in terms of outcomes. Instead, it should be seen “as a matter of social justice and social transformation aimed



at redistributing resources and social value more equally between women and men.” This means that women need to undermine the gender hierarchies that lead to marginalisation of women in the world of politics and economic production. These kinds of changes can be profoundly threatening to men’s privileges, and arouse considerable resistance.

The question remains whether institutions can achieve enough autonomy from dominant interests to challenge male privileges and promote policies necessary for gender equity.

The South Asian experience

In South Asia countries different approaches to institutionalise gender have been used through the last decades, starting during the colonial period (welfare, equity and WID, anti-poverty and empowerment). Only the latter tries to deal with issues of domination and power and recognises the need to change institutionalised oppression (e.g. in laws, property rights, etc), and has its roots in struggles by feminist and women’s grassroots organisations in the developing world.

South Asia offers the paradox of having had one of the first women heads of state and having mobilised thousands into the Grameen bank. On the other hand women bear the greatest burden of gender imbalance, violence and fundamentalism. The forces that affect women’s socio-economic and political status are both internal and external (e.g. SAP, globalisation, crippling of local initiatives and inability of nation-state to resolve problems, consumerism) to nation-states. External forces are compounded by the rise of internal religious fundamentalism. One of the positive outcomes of external forces is the international pressure to mainstream/ institutionalise gender. Failure to achieve this is due to a lack of political commitment and attempts to inject it into entrenched patriarchal systems, without simultaneously working towards social transformation.

The reservations placed by India, Pakistan and Bangladesh against critical Articles of CEDAW that address the issues of equality and non-discrimina-



tion render the Convention ineffective in those countries.⁵ Nepal remains the only South Asian country which has ratified the CEDAW on the basis that all its Articles will pass into national law automatically and does not require separate and specific legislation in order to become a part of the national legal structure.

All South Asian states have established state agencies with the explicit aim of improving the “status of women”. The impetus for this has largely coincided with the United Nations Women’s Conferences since 1975 and the declaration of the UN Women’s Decade (1976-85), such gains were achieved through the contemporary feminist movement. A Women’s Bureau was established in Sri-Lanka in 1977. In India, in 1985 the government established a Ministry of Human Development under which a Department of Women and Child Development was created and in Sri-Lanka a Ministry for Women’s Affairs was established in 1986. The high-point of such initiatives by the state was in the run up to and soon after the Beijing World Women’s Conference in 1995.

In 1990, the Indian Government also established a National Commission for Women. In 1993, the state introduced a Women’s Charter, which included many of the provisos contained in the UN Convention on Women, and with the addition of a section on violence against women. Women’s organisations were deeply involved in the process of drafting the Charter, and have since then, lobbied for the creation of a National Commission on Women, to monitor the implementation of the Charter.⁶ The Institutional Review of the Women in Development (WID) was set in motion before the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Post Beijing, a National Action Plan for Women’s Advancement initiated by the Ministry culminated into a National Policy for Women’s Advancement in March 1997.⁷ A Parliamentary Standing Committee has also been formed in an advisory capacity to the government for reviewing existing programs for the advancement of women and suggesting recommendations for improvement.

In Pakistan, the election of Benazir Bhutto in 1993 coincided with initiation of the pre-Beijing process. The relentless activism in all international



conferences by Pakistan's NGOs had gained visibility and in the lead to Beijing, the government initiated a collaborative process with them through the Ministry of Women's Development. In the aftermath of Beijing, CEDAW was signed in 1996.

The Bhutto regime took an important step in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. It also brought together NGOs, women activists and governmental officials in drafting and developing the 20- year National Plan of Action (NPA) for Women at the federal and provincial levels. However, a change of government soon after resulted in its finalisation after two years.⁸

South Asia is one of the few regions of the world to have produced high-profile women leaders with four out of five countries having women as presidents or Prime Ministers at some point of time in the post-independence history. However, it also remains a region with a very low proportion of women leaders in the federal, state or provincial levels. The roots of this apparent paradox lie in an entrenched patriarchal system prevalent in South Asia. The women leaders at the helm of South Asian countries are a part of the "over the dead body" syndrome whereby widows or daughters of dead charismatic male leaders acquire the legitimacy to take over the leadership in a culture of dynastic politics.⁹

There is another set of patriarchal values that creates many barriers for the ordinary woman to rise to political leadership in South Asia.¹⁰ Recognising this drawback, all countries of the region have instituted affirmative measures to remedy this situation through legal and legislative action.

Numbers do not translate into qualitative gains for women

The Panchayat Raj -- Women in local government

In India, two Constitutional Amendments - the 73rd and 74th - made it possible for 1/3rd of the representatives elected to three-tier Village, Block and District Panchayats to be women. As a consequence over 1 million women throughout India today are members of these local government bodies called Panchayat Raj.¹¹ The Act also ensures that one-third of the positions available for presidents (Sarpanch) of the local-self government councils are reserved for women. The



81st Amendment to make 1/3rd reservations for women in the parliament and the assemblies has been stalled twice and is a subject of much controversy because of demands for reservation within reservation for backward caste women. In September 1996, when the bill was introduced in the parliament, the house was more than half empty and 80 MPs (Members of Parliament, mostly men) submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister threatening to vote against the bill on the grounds that it did not provide reservations for other minorities. Two years later, in July 1998, when the bill was introduced again, the house witnessed a pandemonium as male members used every possible disruptive tactic, including physical assaults forcing five adjournments and effectively scuttled the introduction of the Women's Reservation Bill. ¹²

The example in the box above is termed as the “patriarchal conspiracy” by the women’s movement. It reflects the lack of political will from most of the political parties (except the left, who are in the minority) to give up seats in favour of women.

The Indian experiment with the Panchayati Raj is a unique example of Political Restructuring and Social Transformation in the region. Once the Act came into being, every political party took pains to field their candidates. In some instances, it ended up in political leaders and party members fielding women - wives, sisters, daughters - to stand for elections. The reservation policy has translated into women de jure occupying 33-40% of the positions in the village councils, which are powerful decision making bodies. However, in terms of genuine participation of women, the experience is very mixed and difficult to generalise in a country as vast as India with Panchayat Raj functioning in 22 states.

After independence women have become more marginalised in terms of representation in Parliament and political parties: e.g. in the 1930-40’s there were more women in the Congress Party than there are today in ALL parties together. Women’s position deteriorated in India during Gandhi’s term of office.

In 50 years since India’s independence, the percentage of women members in parliament has never exceeded 7.2%. In fact, in 1996 there was a



set back with women members occupying only 6.2% of a 537-member house.

The democratic political institutions like the panchayats also do little to mitigate the patriarchal value systems that emerge from the complex socio-cultural fabric of the Indian society. One, women have to deal with codes and norms of behaviour (veiling in some states, inability to stay out late at nights in others). This has implications for their participation as leaders in the public sphere. Two, male relatives often call the shots and make all the decisions for the women giving rise to the phenomenon of “proxy/surrogate leaders” and the “dependency syndrome”. Three, for substantial majority, women have a genuine handicap of being catapulted from their kitchens and homes to the forefront of decision making in village matters, with little knowledge of local politics, political processes and power-play. This affects their performance in the meetings, in decision-making and in being assertive with their decisions.

In Bangladesh, women do not stand for elections to the Parliament, but a provision exists to nominate 30 women. However, at the local level, the Union Parishad women are directly elected with reservation of seats.¹³ This is a breakthrough for the purdah-based society of Bangladesh. In the parliament, women’s political participation by nomination through “protected” representation is variously interpreted as negative, because of women’s disadvantaged position in the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh that precludes them from competing successfully with male politicians from territorial constituencies. The nomination process renders women’s participation in the legislature fully dependent on male patronage of the party in power and effectively undermines women’s representative status. In the recent electoral politics of Bangladesh where no party won an absolute majority, the women’s seats have become the “deciding factor” for the party that gets the maximum seats to form the government. As for the Union Parishad women at the local level, several problems have emerged, including physical violence and the rape of five women members. One member



was raped for refusing to be corrupt and have the “audacity” to file a complaint with the police.

In Pakistan, since its inception in 1947, reservation for women has increased from 3 per cent to 10 per cent in 1985, ironically, this was during the period of martial law and military dictatorship where retrogressive legislation on women’s rights were introduced. Translating to 20 seats for women, the military dictator nominated women from religious groups to these seats. The reservation for women has operated on the principle of indirect elections, where deputies of the national and provincial assemblies elect the women representatives. This procedure has, like in the case of Bangladesh, strengthened the hold of male politicians in the male dominated political parties and provided them with the means of increasing the party seats through this provision. Since 1990, this provision has elapsed and subsequent assemblies as a result have had very few women parliamentarians.¹⁴

Sri Lanka –with one of the highest Human Development indicators in the developing world (e.g. no gender difference in school enrolment and unlike other countries under study, women have a greater life expectancy than males), has not translated these gains into women’s participation in mainstream institutions. Constitutionally and legally women have guaranteed equal political rights (since 1931). Yet, there are low levels of women’s representation at all levels of government and this has decreased between 1991-1997. This is due to the dual role in family (wife/mother) and social and cultural prejudices, which negate constitutionally guaranteed political freedom. Historically, women’s political involvement and attainment of high positions is dependent on and reinforced by patriarchal and dynastic elements. (*Refer to table 2.1.*)

In Nepal, since the restoration of democracy in 1990, constitutional provisions were introduced making it mandatory to nominate at least 5 per cent women candidates for the election to the House of Representatives



and 7 women seats in National Assembly. A 20 per cent reservation for women at the ward level has been introduced increasing women's representation in the village council, resulting in an estimated 36,000 women as Elected ward representatives in Nepal. In Sri-Lanka there is a proposal to reserve 25 per cent of the seats in the Parliament and at the local level.

Victories of women's struggle

Many women activists who tactically allied with progressive and sympathetic politicians have targeted constitution-writing processes as an opportunity in influencing the state from a gender perspective. In Thailand, a campaign waged by the 35-member Women and Constitution Network resulted in the inclusion of five issues related to gender equality in six articles of the 1997 constitution. Thus, guarantees of gender equality, protection from domestic violence, elimination of discrimination against women, protection of female labour and women's representation in the parliamentary special commission have been incorporated. Women's groups in Thailand and Malaysia have also successfully pressed their respective governments to withdraw most of its reservations to specific articles of the CEDAW.

Activists working in the border of Burma have utilised CEDAW to raise consciousness among women refugees on the issue of women's rights. NGOs in Thailand used the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW as their common ground with government when discussing women's issues.

The South East Asian experience¹⁵

Policy and legislative advances

Intensive lobbying by women's groups has also led to the enactment of codes and legislation that uphold women's interests. A most significant accomplishment in the last five years is in the area of violence against women (VAW). In Malaysia, the government enforced the Domestic Violence Act in 1996, two years after it was passed as a law. In Thailand, laws on traf-



ficking in women have been promulgated. In the Philippines, a recent legislation has declared sexual harassment as unlawful in the employment, education or training environment while a new Anti-Rape Law has redefined rape as a crime against persons, and not against chastity.

The sustained advocacy and lobby for the passage of such landmark laws have demonstrated that violence in gender relations is a development and justice issue, and not a private matter as prevailing notions insist. Women have politicised issues that have been relegated to the private domain and have been able to slowly transform the conduct and culture of politics. Indeed, women's political struggles have forced the issue of government's accountability to women in addressing VAW.

Even as the principle of gender equality is affirmed in codes and legislation, it is often thwarted in practice. Laws protecting women's rights and interests have yet to be implemented and fully enforced, and their effectiveness tested in court. The challenge is to translate legal status into legal reality. For despite women's constitutional right to equality with men in all respects, many influences discriminating against the advancement of women remain intact. This is because the institutions that prop up the patriarchal ideology and systems have not been transformed.

Gender mainstreaming and national women's machineries

“When a new issue, such as gender, appears on the planning agenda, the first question raised is who will deal with it? Is it necessary to create an entirely new institutional structure or is it more appropriate to institutionalise it within existing mainstream organisations? Or is the best strategy simultaneously to do both?”

In most countries, both strategies of gender mainstreaming and setting up machineries for women's advancement have been established by governments, as a result of pressure from the international community, the women's movements and funding imperatives.



Cognisant that rhetoric will not automatically translate into affirmative action, representatives of the world's women at the International Women's Year conference in Mexico City in 1975 pushed governments to establish an agency or institutional mechanisms dedicated to promoting equality and gender equity and improving the status and conditions of women. The term "national women's machineries" (NWMs) has been adopted to refer to these agencies which have emerged as key institutional systems for the advancement of women, with government focal points as their primary components. NWMs are tasked with co-ordinating policy-making and supporting government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas. They serve as advisory and co-ordinating bodies. Their tasks include issue identification, priority setting, advocacy, awareness building, policy development, policy analysis, policy influence, welfare protection and monitoring. They also act as a link between government and NGOs.

Mainstreaming in relation to gender and women has gained importance since the Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985. This refers to bringing the gender perspective into the national life which is defined by the UN as 'the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.'

Structural barriers to gender mainstreaming and institutionalisation Despite its common usage in government rhetoric, it was by no means clear to national development agencies just what mainstreaming meant. Many misconceptions continue to confuse policy makers and development agencies. Firstly, that mainstreaming is the responsibility of the ministry for women, gender units and women staff (as opposed to being the respon-



sibility of all key decision-makers such as the head of state, the cabinet, the ministers). Secondly, that mainstreaming is just about special projects, programmes and policies for women (as opposed to promoting the full and equal participation of women in decision-making in all areas and at all levels). Thirdly, that gender analysis is not necessary, nor is it used on a routine basis to identify the differential access to and impacts on women and men of all projects, programmes and policies. Fourthly, that such analysis does not have to be used to devise measures to bring about equal participation and equal benefits for women and men. Fifthly, mainstreaming is seen as changes for women and will only benefit women (as opposed to changing gender relationships between women and men in order to achieve more equal sharing of power and responsibility, that benefits both women and men). There is also a fallacy that mainstreaming is only about changes in women's gender roles and capacities (as opposed to requiring changes in men's roles, attitudes and behaviours as well).

National machineries and the reproduction of gender hierarchies

State-sponsored NWMs in SEA were created 'top-down' by the political leadership as a response to the demand from the international community during the Women's decade. This meant that their creation was often more a symbolic gesture than a legitimisation of women's activities. Except for the Philippines, they are not given the power to initiate legislative action that is deemed as an important measure for institutionalising changes.

National machineries generally have very little formal power, as their status in the government hierarchy is generally low. The tendency has been for them to use the "referent power" of their ministers or that of a sympathetic patron, such as head of state. They thus become dependent on these allies. Some heads or directors of national machineries use their personal charismatic power to effect change, failing to understand that when the issues, approaches and activities are viewed as personal to the head of the agency, it becomes difficult to sustain any gains achieved when that person leaves the position.



Bureaucrats view WID as an instrument rather than a goal itself: a means for economic growth or more successful political mobilisation. Income-generating activities for women are promoted, but a redefinition of sex roles to alleviate the resulting double burden is ignored despite its commitment to promoting the welfare of workers. Given the narrow conceptualisation of women's work, issues such as prostitution and mail order brides have not been seen as legitimate concerns of the labour department.

Stubborn male resistance within bureaucracies and a generally hostile environment remain to be one of the most formidable barriers to mainstreaming gender. This is because governments in the main have continued to see women as an add-on or separate matter, purely the concern of the women's bureau.

It comes as no surprise then that national machineries are criticised from all fronts - from within the bureaucracy and from NGOs and women's groups who criticise them for consistently under-performing and not "getting institutions right" for women.

National plans and public policies

Lack of political commitment to gender equity is reflected in state budgetary allocations

"Governments in (South East Asia) can claim that they are committed to the Beijing Platform for Action and could quickly show evidences to back up such claim.

Everywhere, there are women-friendly policy statements, national machineries, or national plans for women. However, all governments will also claim that the main reason for non-implementation is the question of finances, particularly at this time when national budgets are tighter and economies have either shrunk or stagnated. When times were good, government financing for women's development was already low.

The lack of finances is therefore not the only and most critical factors as to why governments lack success in performance. Re-



regardless of whether there is money or not, commitment to the advancement of women that requires gender responsive policies, plans, programmes and monitoring schemes, have always been given an insignificant slice of the pie.¹⁶

Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand have formulated national plans and identified priority areas. With the exception of the richest country, Brunei, although these governments have allocated resources for women-specific development programmes they remain negligible. In Thailand, the budget allocated directly for women development is only 0.003 of the overall budget¹⁷. In Indonesia, a case in point is the Ministry of Education, which allocated less than 1% to women-specific development programmes.

Women in power and decision making

In most countries, policy-makers, development planners and programmers, particularly at decision-making levels, are men. Given this, gender-mainstreaming efforts in Asia Pacific has particularly emphasised increasing women's active involvement in politics, leadership and governance. Even though there are some improvements in the participation of women in politics and decision-making in the Asia Pacific region, women still remain minorities in national legislative bodies and other government apparatus. For instance, female representation in the national assemblies of the South East Asian countries ranges from 6 to 13 percent. (*Refer to table 2.1.*)

Confinement to traditional sectors

Institutional barriers as presented by prevailing political systems and structures impede women's participation. Political parties are male-dominated and quotas set for women's participation are rarely met. Most political parties do not have women's platform and do not assist women to take on leadership roles. The exorbitant financial costs of running for public office are a major barrier to the political participation of women, and their marginalised social sectors. Women compared with men have limited ac-



cess to political resources, e.g., the support of political parties and private business interests. The “winner take all” type of electoral system effectively rules out minority groups such as women. Such system diminishes women’s chances of getting elected because they must garner the majority vote to win a seat, unlike a proportional representation system.

There continues to be an absence of educational and awareness-raising programmes that address gender equality in political and public life, and that build consciousness among women that they can exercise considerable political power as a major political constituency. Bruns observed that attempts to establish all-women or feminist parties have generally failed, but that this should not be misconstrued as a bad sign. “Because women are as different as men are. They stand for, vote for and live in different value systems. So the fact of being a woman is not enough to constitute the programme of a party. But even if some feminist parties have failed they have proved to be a good tool to pressure for gender issues later taken up by bigger parties. Parties in Asia now are beginning to realise that the female vote is an important one. So there is a chance for pressure on certain issues if the female voters are making themselves heard by not voting for those who do not represent their issues.”

In addition, the growing religious fundamentalism and the lack of access to new communication and information technologies serve as factors that limit women’s active political participation. The rise in religious fundamentalism is acting to prevent women from seeking public office. Women who have taken up the challenge and entered political life, especially at the local government levels, have found themselves vulnerable and actually subjected to various forms of violence such as harassment, physical assault, rape and even murder. Similarly, the threat of and use of violence is being employed to intimidate women from seeking office.



The Latin American and Caribbean experiences of institutionalisation¹⁸

Reasserting culture in institutional transformation

Feminists in Latin America state that we should re-think the importance of relating to power as it is, and consider whether existing power that dominates is what is needed. The concepts of plurality, diversity, affection, and solidarity, are what should inform feminists' agenda for institutionalisation. Latin American experiences point to the State, as not neutral, because the State is composed of people. The same is the case of the markets. Therefore feminists need to debate the process of institutionalisation because it leads to co-option and containment rather than transformation.¹⁹ There are common trends in Latin America and Caribbean as emerged in other regions of the South.

Securing the gains

Feminists claim that more time and energy needs to be put into analysing the gains achieved through women's struggles. Women entering political spaces and national machinery are the first phase but this needs to be taken further.

Gender, while no longer a marginal issue within society, is not yet a significant part of the Governments' agenda. Gender justice is not one of the aims of current economic development process. For this reason women have to focus on mainstreaming gender in all public policies. The movements towards gender justice should be accompanied by other changes in institutions, in the organisations, but women can not wait for the change to happen, they have to engage with institutions of power.

However, there is growing recognition that more institutionalisation does not mean more power. Further, it is important to analyse the issue of institutionality and try to change it. Women should also think of the creation of new mechanisms and ways of transforming existing structures. In



Mexico, women have not been sufficiently capable of intervening in the mechanisms in which national priorities are decided.

Transforming national budgets

A significant shift has taken place in Latin American and Caribbean states over the years. While in the past women engaged in programmes and projects today there is an attempt to examine national budgets from a gender perspective. Budgets are key in the political economy of countries and are the policy tools through which the redistribution of resources can be effected. Women's exercise of political pressure on budgets needs, however to be increased.

Changes in the institutionalising of gender

Gina Vargas highlighted the changes that have taken place during the nineties owing to internal pressure of feminists, external pressure in the form of recommendations from UN conferences and pressure from bilateral and multilateral entities and the modernisation projects of States.

By mid-eighties, countries such as Brazil had created the first state institutions to address women's issues as a demonstration of their commitment. By the nineties most of the countries of the region had introduced gender machinery. State institutions that were set up to address gender concerns made attempts to include gender equity perspectives in social policies. People began to identify women as significant actors in the use of local spaces, able to mediate, and also able to assist in the development of women as a category of excluded people.

Variations in institutional responses

In response to mobilisation from women and the diversity of claims there have been marked variations in how governments have responded. The response could be characterised as having varied orientations and promoting the use of differentiated power. In this regard, Vicki Guzmán identified three types of responses from the State. States react in ways that reinforce the stereotype notion that women should remain exclusively inside the family. They also identify specific problems of women and their families with a corre-



sponding sector of public institutions and attempt to provide “women specific” solutions. A few states have responded to feminist engagement by introducing a gender perspective and analysis into policies and programmes.

Although there are exceptions, institutions tend to focus on economic and social spheres and have not promoted an inclusive citizenship or women’s political participation. But even institutions are weak, without a budget of their own. They compete for funds with civil society, they have not gendered equality policies in the State and they do not establish clear mediation and negotiation channels with civil society and feminists. Experience shows that more progress can be attained not only in democratic contexts but also when there is participation for reforms, as well as a better level of gender institutionality in the state machinery.

Forming a “power triangle”

Women have underscored the importance of a “power triangle”, of an alliance between feminists of civil society, feminists in the state bureaucracy or “femocrats” and political feminists. The region does not have a critical mass of femocrats²⁰ within state bureaucracies. Instead, people come together during emergencies and do not attempt to consolidate power for social transformation.

Quotas within neo-liberal policies constrain gender equity

There have been some gains through, quotas have been successful in countries such as Argentina (from 4% to 21% and then 28%), Brazil, Salvador and Nicaragua. In Peru, the number of candidacies and women elected into politics has grown. But there are countries, such as Bolivia, where quotas did not result in a significant increase of women’s participation in elective offices, mainly because the quota was no longer linked to the electoral system. Quotas have not been approved in countries such as Chile because of the authoritarian composition of the Senate.

While quotas increase the numbers of women who enter political space, when this happens within a neo-liberal context the possibility for transformation and gender justice are constrained. Women in the region indicate



that this context tends to limit the State's role and subordinates public policies to the logic of market forces.

Autonomous agendas and alliances

There is not only one feminist agenda but several, overlapping and accumulative agendas, at the same time operating within different levels and spaces through which women want to exert influence and introduce changes. These agendas intend to consolidate democratic spaces and build alliances with other movements and social or political forces with the same objective. Alliances can sometimes diffuse and weaken the feminist agenda for change. But feminist agendas also have a "hard core" that focuses on long-term transformation. This is not easily negotiable with the rest of the actors and provides feminists with strategic focus on the cultural-political project of women's emancipation.

Feminist proposals should be a point of mobilisation by many sectors of society, because they then have more possibilities of being incorporated into state agendas. Not resorting to this is a mistake. In this way, the promotion of different agendas by civil society organisations offers strategic possibilities in engaging with the state. Thus, feminist agendas should become "navigation charts" which serve as a guide under different circumstances and possibilities so as to keep feminist ethics and negotiations balanced.

African experiences of institutionalisation

Pereira²¹ explains that attempts to institutionalise gender equity and equality in Africa have taken the form of Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) desks, bureaux, committees, departments in ministries and sometimes whole ministries in themselves. Furthermore, from the late 1980s onwards, funding agencies shifted their policies from providing small sums towards women and development projects to the integration of gender concerns in general projects or what is referred to as gender mainstreaming. According to Pereira institutionalisation of WID and GAD requires two preconditions: First the state has to be viewed as



legitimate, a neutral body that exists as a site for the common good. Second, there must be *political will* and *political commitment* to address issues of gender inequality, discrimination and domination. She points out that in reality, state legitimacy is questionable. The economic changes associated with globalisation, have brought about new political changes that make the state even more illegitimate.

The main threat of the shift from WID and GAD approaches to gender mainstreaming is that there is a possibility of the abolition of women's desks. The argument for the abolition of women's desks is that the focus on women exclusively has not only been ineffective, but has also served to marginalise women further. Pereira further points out that the mainstreaming approach is used, for instance, by Canadian, Scandinavian and the European Union donor agencies. Citing Tarasher and Ford-Smith (1990: 38), she raises several questions regarding this mainstreaming approach.

1. Where mainstreaming is adopted as policy, what will be the mechanisms to guarantee continued attention to women's power within these projects? How will women be sure that the apparently neutral category of 'gender' will operate to empower them?
2. Can project officers – the majority of whom are men operating in male dominated organisations with little knowledge or experience in dealing with gender – cope critically with the growing needs of women? Can crash courses in gender for project staff – unaccompanied by changes in the structures of many of these organisations – result in positive effects for women?
3. Why are policies towards women being conceptualised in such an either-or fashion? Clearly women need both women-specific and integrated activities and organisations.

The Human Rights framework developed after the World Conference in Vienna in 1993²² allowed for the mainstreaming of feminism. She points out that, Human Rights discourse constructs women as exercising popular sovereignty through global, national and regional networks. With this impetus, shadow reports have emerged as critique of governments' Human Rights strategy.



With regard to institutionalisation of gender, Mama explains that African governments introduced structures for women with varying degrees of effectiveness, with or without the involvement of women's movements. Examples of those structures are women's desks and departments or presidential-commissions and ministries which co-ordinate women in development (WID) projects.

According to Mama, it seems that these structures are probably the consequence of international feminism because African governments have signed the international documents that have committed them to various conventions. But WID initiatives have long been challenged for reinforcing women's subordinate roles in labour intensive, small-scale income generating projects. Moreover they generate more work for women and exacerbate gender conflict and male irresponsibility.

Related to issues of gender mainstreaming and institutionalisation are concerns with the type of categories that women ascribe to themselves and others without realising the roots of such analysis. Assié-Lumumba²³ raises a fundamental question of labelling African women who are engaged in scholarly and activist works, in terms of the philosophical and epistemological issues involved in the analysis from feminism to "womanism". She further questions the assumptions upon which gender mainstreaming is based. According to her, mainstreaming is based on the assumptions that a) the state failed to fulfil its duty towards women, b) it is possible to induce elements of change to transform significantly the original nature and mission of the African state, and c) women, particularly in large numbers, will be able to achieve the goals of transforming the state or at least to establish honest and productive partnerships with the state. She argues that the view that the state has failed to fulfil its duty towards women is tautology. For her, it is the same as arguing that capitalism has failed to satisfy the needs of the workers and that it is possible to transform it into a human-centred and pro-working class system. By implication, the state is not designed to address the needs of women.



Diaw similarly argues that nominal independence of African states merely translated simply into “nationalisation of the state”. The essence of the inherited/received state was not questioned with regards to its actual responsibilities towards the entire and specific segments of the population, particularly women. She articulates that the state’s inherent inability to occupy the entire socio-geographical space that officially corresponds to its definition has led to a process of socio-spatial re-mapping. Indeed, a new phenomenon of “non citizen zones” where law and order have lost their meaning, is expanding.

Nonetheless, liberal feminists argue that women have been denied equal rights, deprived of full political participation and treated differently on the basis of sex. They further argue that this treatment of women violates liberalism’s guarantee of liberty, equality and justice for all. Thus they demand that every individual should receive equal consideration regardless of sex and specifically call on the state to take positive steps to compensate women in the market and home.

Institutional sation of gender in the Pacific²⁴

The institutionalisation process in the region is still at the infant stage and, therefore, with the exception of Fiji, feminist activism in the region is largely:

- On specific issues, such as sexual violence, labour laws, nuclear and environmental issues.
- Urban initiated and concentrated, as in Fiji and Vanuatu, and fanning out to rural areas and networking with other Pacific countries.
- Appears to be ‘going with the flow’, that is, following international policies and programmes, rather than arguing for alternative strategies through challenging the prevailing mechanisms, which limit women.

She describes the institutionalization process in the Pacific as part of a continuum with awareness raising through Gender Sensitization Programmes (GSP) at one end; occupying the middle ground are countries which have some institutional measures for engendering; and, at the other



end are some countries with comprehensive reform programmes, such as Vanuatu.

Conclusion

The type of relationships women and feminist organisations have with the state remains problematic. There is some degree of collaboration between the state apparatus, such as national machineries and the women's movements to institutionalise gender. Yet tensions and conflicts are experienced in this relationship since the ideology of the state remains fundamentally patriarchal and the states' engagement with women tends to be that of using women for development purposes. Alongside this already difficult situation is that women have to deal with bureaucrats and their sexist attitudes on a daily basis.

Increasing the number of women engaged in politics and decision-making has been part of a strategy to ensure that women's rights and issues are put onto the agenda for social transformation. However, the quality of women's participation, that is, their capacity to present a direct challenge to dominant political values, and male-dominated processes has to be improved if strategic gains are to be achieved.

Despite the formidable obstacles faced by women, to abandon the project of institutionalising gender is not an option. For example, as an agent for institutionalising gender, national machineries, however marginal they remain, have been instrumental in making visible the gender issues, invoking the international and constitutional mandates, and challenging the dominant male discourse in the bureaucracy. To a certain extent, national machineries have served as an ally of civil society in pushing for gender equality and equity issues in government spaces.

In waging political struggles, global and national women's movements can benefit from having a space in government where women's issues and interests can be articulated and advanced. Successes in legislative and policy advocacy indicate that such contestation and negotiation can indeed take place.



Mainstream or male stream²⁵ debates on the nature of states, from both the right and the left²⁶ and the contradictory logic of how governments make decisions with regard to women and their fundamental human rights as citizens needs to be challenged. In addition engagement at policy levels should not result in complacency because of the co-option of gendered language and the rhetoric of public participation. It is just as important to track the implementation of policy objectives to assess whether such policy shifts have brought with them a qualitative difference to the lives of the poorest women. Consequently the mainstreaming process has to become an opportunity to restructure from within (changing policy, structure and political culture) as opposed to adapting to the dominant ideology.

Notes

- 1 This Chapter draws on research papers prepared for DAWN PRST by Farah Kabir (South Asia), Maria Luz Tiongson (Southern East Asia)
- 2 Commitment 5: From the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, World Summit for Social Development 06-12 March 1995 – United Nations
- 3 UN Secretary-General's Report to Commission on Status of Women, 43rd session March 1999
- 4 As quoted in M.L. Tiongson, 1999, paper for DAWN PRST Research, South East Asia
- 5 Abeysekera, 1999, DAWN PRST meeting, Cape Town
- 6 See Abeysekera 1999, DAWN PRST meeting, Cape Town
- 7 See Kabir Farah, 1999. Key features of this policy include overall empowerment of women and measures for gender equality in administration, politics, education, economic activities, culture and sports. An important objective is to move from the system of nomination to the Parliament to direct elections.
- 8 See Farida Shaheed 1999a.
- 9 See Kincaid Diane. 1978. Party leaders also cash on the wave of sympathy from the electorate and prop up dead leaders' female relatives.
- 10 Gender discriminatory laws, religious fundamentalism, norms of seclusion, socially ascribed roles and responsibilities, illiteracy (due to denial of opportunities for the girl-child) and negative social and cultural practices are some



- of the barriers for women's political participation and rise to leadership.
- 11 Panchayat Raj translates as "Local Self-Governance". In India, under the Panchayat Raj Act, an estimated 225000 village councils, 5100 block councils and 4750 district councils are legitimized.
 - 12 From Mukerjee, Vanita, 2000 Regional Syntheses Paper on Political Restructuring and Social Transformation in South Asia, prepared for DAWN.
 - 13 The Union Parishad Ordinance (1997) enabled women to be directly elected. More than 46,000 women stood for elections for the 12,828 reserved seats. See Kabir F., 1999
 - 14 See Mumtaz K., 1998
 - 15 While this section is based on Maria Luz Tiongsons' paper (1999) for DAWN's PRST, South East Asia, on the State and the Institutionalization of Gender Equity in South East Asia, the issues raised in her work are common across the South.
 - 16 South East Asia Summary Report, The Asia Pacific Regional NGO Symposium, September 1999, Kasetsart University, Thailand
 - 17 WEDO Report, 1999 New York
 - 18 This section draws in the work of Virginia Vargas, 1999, "New Courses of Action of Feminisms during the nineties: Strategies and discourses", prepared for DAWN's PRST Research.
 - 19 Sonia Miguel, 1999, DAWN PRST Research meeting in Brazil.
 - 20 "Femocrats" is a term that is used to denote women working in bureaucracy.
 - 21 Pereira: in DAWN PRST Africa Regional Report "Cracks in the Edifice", 2000, Cape Town
 - 22 Pereira, 1999, DAWN's PRST Africa Research meeting, Cape Town
 - 23 Assié-Lumumba, 1999, DAWN's PRST Africa Research meeting, Cape Town, through the title of her paper containing "Women's Movements"
 - 24 Ana Maui Taufe – Ulungaki: 2000 In Pacific Regional PRST Synthesis Paper prepared for DAWN
 - 25 Mainstreaming and Male -streaming has to do with how women and feminists accept as a given the dominant mode or adapt to the dominant form of governance.
 - 26 World Bank Report of 1997, Report on Global Governance by Commission on Global Governance, the South Commissions Report, and many other publications



Chapter 5

Feminist movements and the state: Countervailing forces?

“We commit ourselves to creating an economic, political, social cultural and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development.”¹

Introduction

The changed context since 1995, post the World Summit on Social Development and the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing requires a critical analysis of what has happened to the women’s and feminist movements. Indeed, in the wake of these conferences questions are being asked about the differences that exist between the feminist movement, women’s movement and social movement activism. Further, there is growing debate on the extent to which the limited gains achieved, in the struggle for gender equality, have been reversed by both economic and other forms of fundamentalism in national and regional contexts. Moreover, the multiple and diverse relationships women of the south have with state and civil society organisations, it is argued, diffuses their impact in consolidating and advancing the social transformation agenda.

In this chapter, feminists of the south, engage in critical analyses on some of these questions. They raise issues on the nature of the state, women’s historical and contemporary relationships with the state and other formations. The need to re-conceptualise and interrogate from a feminist perspective the different sites of struggle and appropriate strategies for trans-



formation are also raised. Experiences of women in the regions of the south resonate across time and space with the commonality of forms of discrimination, exploitation, exclusion and pain. The narrative of women's exclusion and the brutal violence experienced or mediated through class, race, religious and ethnic hierarchies are a painful reminder that much more needs to be done. The views and experiences from the regions of the south underscore this.

Feminist² movements, social movements and the state: Perspectives from South Asia³

The present context

The last fifty years in South Asia show that religious, linguistic, regional, cultural and ethnic differences have continued to play a critical role in both social formation and fragmentation. Structures of governance have grown more authoritarian and repressive, societies have become more militarised and violence against women and minority communities has increased. In the economic arena, the move has been from protectionism (with emphasis on development of national industries and investment) to the 'open economy' (neo-liberalism).

Difference and diversity

The inability of the state to accommodate the varied demands of the different social groups led to both peaceful and violent reactions. The rise of fundamentalism and conservatism throughout the region maybe understood as a backlash against the push for equal rights by different groups. Women and members of other oppressed groups have joined together in the last few decades to form new "social movements" to address these tendencies.

Continued conflict in the region, based on ethnic, religious and class issues highlights the inability of post-colonial states to develop a democratic framework of governance that treats all citizens with equal respect



and accommodates difference with dignity. The rise in religious fundamentalism is demonstrated by Bangladesh's abandonment of the secular principle in 1988, while the Islamic principles in which Pakistan was founded have been reinterpreted in more conservative forms; in Sri Lanka and Bhutan ongoing conflicts are more related to ethnic identities.

The inability of states to deal with issues of diversity has led to increasing intolerance and fostered the growth of forms of communalism, violence, racism, ethnic and religious hatred. The principle of secularism as a means of affirming democratic praxis in a multi-religious society has been seriously eroded. As a result there are numerous struggles for self-determination and autonomy within and across borders.

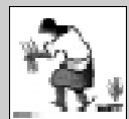
The rise in all forms of intolerance leads to an increase in violence and women's vulnerability to violence. The discriminatory laws prevalent all over South Asia based on culture and religion deny women rights in the 'private' life (marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody of children and maintenance) and impose restrictions on their mobility and autonomy. They also become vulnerable to sexual attack and abuse by the 'enemy'.

Conflicts in the region have resulted in thousands of refugees and internally displaced people, women being the largest group and most vulnerable to exploitation and oppression. The state's ability to safeguard women's rights is under siege due to both the weakening of the state and the rise in conservatism, where identity based politics is the determining factor.

Feminist movements response to difference and diversity

These prevailing realities in South Asia have led to a radical rethinking of concepts of "difference" and "diversity" within the women's movement. The recognition of difference is a key factor and the formation of the Dalit Women's Association (India) and the growing awareness of caste-based oppression and women's subordination has been an example of this process.

In parts of India the movement of dalit, tribal and indigenous people has become one of the strongest in the country and in the region – the role played by women in terms of engagement in organisational and mobilisation work has been significant (rather than at decision making level). While



the complexities of class and sexual orientation continue to play a critical role in defining the parameters of women's lives in South Asia, diversity in terms of ethnicity, language and religion have become prominent.

The feminist movement and the state

The birth of feminist movements in the region coincided with many developments in the national and international arena. Nationally, the growing concern and awareness of specific issues that affected women regardless of their other identities of 'class', 'race', 'caste' or ethnicity' led to many debates among women activists. Violence against women within the household and outside, wage-disparities in the prevailing gender division of labour, oppressive practices that were legitimised and sanctioned in the name of religion, culture and tradition and a cursory treatment of these issues by existing organizations, whether party, non-party, left or socialists led to women forming their own organizations "autonomously" (to connote a separate, women only group and non-party affiliation) and as 'feminists' to address the deeply embedded structures and institutions of patriarchy that perpetuate gender discrimination.

Over the last two and half decades, feminist movement activism and the strategies devised have altered the political terrain of the region. The movement is constantly faced with the challenges of engaging with the state and its institutions. Regional dynamics, configurations and political climate dictate the options available to women. In the early phase, confrontational strategies and campaigns to demand justice and accountability were the hallmark of the movement.

However, two separate but interrelated issues have changed the course of engagement. Firstly, the nature of the state in South Asia (secular, democratic, and authoritarian) determines the strategies used to push for change. Secondly, the growing realization that the state and its actors, despite its patriarchal nature, is not monolithic and there are some spaces available for the movement to use and gain leverage. Further, the commitments made by the state through international covenants and conferences provide a



framework of rights against which women can demand accountability, though the latter raises many dilemmas for the movement.

Influences of UN conferences and changes in the international arena

Internationally, the declaration of the United Nations Women's year and Decade built bridges with women's groups outside the region and the proliferation of research studies on gender issues also provided the impetus for cross-fertilization of ideas and action. The influence and ideas of feminists groups that started in the urban areas soon spread to the rural areas in terms of influencing the agenda of rural-based groups and movements with an incorporation of issues of rape, violence and abduction of women.⁴

In the non-state sector, the second wave of feminism in the West had its impact on South Asia- activists as well as academics started taking up issues such as domestic work, violence against women, abortion and rape. The rapid incorporation of women workers in South Asia in the "new international division of labour" also became the subject of study and debate. In the region this interaction led to the creation of women's studies centres, women's groups that took up women's issues and popularised feminist thought. In the state sector concern over the slow improvement of the status of women led to 1975 being declared International Women's Year by the UN and of the Decade for Women (1975-1985) following the first Women's Conference in Mexico.

The 1970s also saw the creation of NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs) and peoples' organisations (PO's) in the region. These organisations got their support from foreign donors (bilateral and non-state donor agencies) for the establishment of community based and constituency based "non-political" development initiatives. Other major processes of economic and social transformation in the region gave impetus to self-organisation primarily amongst the poorest. Women began to create opportunities for their advancement on issues such as health, nutrition, literacy income generation and consciousness raising.



In 1977, Pakistan's constitution was abrogated, martial law was declared and fundamental rights were suspended. The process of Islamisation threatened to take away any semblance of women's rights left in the country and women's groups across the country galvanized to form a united front, the Women's Action Forum (WAF). It became an influential platform bringing together voices of all progressive women and organisations. Further, alliances were made with media, lawyers and doctors. Key media advocacy and other strategies against repressive laws received international attention, thereby embarrassing the government.

The women's movement used two strategies - confrontationalist tactics on the one hand and lobbying with key members on the other. Lobbying against the martial law regime raised its own set of dilemmas for WAF. A number of activists refused to engage with a government headed by a military dictator. However, the implementation of certain laws and the serious impacts, left women with no choice but to engage in lobbying.⁵ Another dilemma was whether or not to use religious arguments and religious scholars to counter retrogressive interpretation of religious texts by the military regime, moreover, whether the women's movement should maintain a clear secular stance.

Claiming women's rights as human rights

Another strategy of the movement has been to frame the issue of women's rights squarely under the rubric of a human rights framework. As human rights have universal legitimacy, the movement unambiguously recognizes violence against women as a crime against humanity. The women's movement in Pakistan, for instance, uses international opinion and pressure to make it difficult for religious or cultural interpretations to counter women's rights.

Dowry deaths: When culture and capitalism converge

Dowry is the custom in India, predominantly among Hindus, of giving gifts in cash and kind from the bride's family to the groom's family at the time of marriage. In recent years, consumerism has led to an increase in demands of cash and presents given in kind, failure of which leads to harassment and violence against the bride. In many instances, this results in murder of the bride by burning her alive with kerosene. This is then construed as an "accident" or "suicide" by the groom's family. The



scale and frequency of these deaths by “suicides” and “accidents” rarely evoked any investigation from the police or the state, leaving the groom’s family scot-free- free to marry again for more dowry. In the mid-seventies, a campaign started in Delhi against violence and harassment meted out to women for bringing insufficient dowry. This campaign snowballed to several metropolitan cities of India. Demonstrations against dowry deaths, recording the dying statements of women and producing evidence in the court encouraged many families to lodge complaints with the police against dowry harassment of their daughters. Trade-Unions, neighbourhood groups and teachers’ associations joined the campaign and several key strategies by women’s groups led to the state passing a law against dowry-related crimes in 1980. The loopholes and the chequered implementation of this law that went through a few amendments meant few culprits were convicted. The law hardly proved a deterrent in giving or accepting dowry.

When police protection means rape for poor women

The agitation against rape started in late seventies, with campaigns against police rape which occurred at an alarming frequency. Several cases made news across different states of India and were mostly perpetrated on the poor, labouring class women of India. In Hyderabad, in 1978, a woman named Rameeza Bee was gang-raped by the police and her husband murdered for protesting. This led to a popular uprising that was quelled only after the state government was dismissed and a commission of enquiry was set up. In 1979, in Maharashtra, Mathura, a seventeen year old girl was raped by local policemen. They were convicted in the high court, but acquitted by the Supreme Court when the defence argued that Mathura had a boyfriend and was a loose-charactered woman and therefore, by definition could not be raped. This argument implied that, in India, women who lost or were assumed to have lost their virginity before marriage were “by definition” open to sexual advances from other men which justified rape. The same logic has been used by the judiciary for prostitutes who by definition cannot be raped.

The campaign against rape was sparked off by the Mathura trial and networks spearheaded by Forum against Rape (FAR)⁶ demanded a reopening of the trial. In Bombay and Delhi, alliances were formed with Socialist and communist party affiliates, trade-unions and neighbourhood groups. The movement was covered widely by the press and police atrocities began to receive attention from the opposition parties who used it as a political lever against the ruling party in power. The turning point was yet another case, where Maya Tyagi, in Harayana, was stripped naked, raped and paraded by the police in the streets. The incident aroused much furore by



women's movement, political parties and in the parliament who demanded the Home Ministers resignation. The government introduced a bill soon after, that defined categories of custodial rape and specified a mandatory punishment of ten years' imprisonment, in camera trials and a shift of the onus of the proof onto the accused. This radical piece of legislation raised controversy on proof; clause on the grounds that innocent men could be framed with rape charges. Moreover, problems of implementation, interpretation and definition with what constitutes rape (technically only penetration by penis) made it onerous for rape victims to prove the crime.

The campaigns against dowry and rape by feminist movement with its mixed outcomes point to the difficulties of implementing laws to protect women. The positive lessons were the support the movement could garner and the media advocacy that paid off in highlighting the issue. However, the political exploitation of the issue and the mileage gained by the opposition parties were sobering reminders of how political expediency can co-opt women's issues.

Feminist struggles and social movements

The phenomena of social movements, needs to be seen at best, as a process of constant change and transformation. Despite their ever-changing nature, they are able to build alliances across a wide range of differences and engage in actions that result in social, political and economic changes. Women's movements fall within the definition of social movements and are a good example of how their policy changes. The way in which feminist and women's movements organised with progressive coalitions did influence their ability to act coherently. This is exemplified by the pre- and post-Beijing activism, that changed the women's movement.

The process pre- and post-Beijing

The activism and preparations towards Beijing was critical and wide-ranging. Women's groups and organisations prepared situation reports, and analysis of the status of women, met at sub-regional meetings and participated in official meetings. Following the adoption of the Beijing platform



for Action different groups took on different roles. But the rapidly deteriorating economic and political situation has led to a dissipation of the pre-Beijing activism and enthusiasm. While some groups have been working on specific issues there is also a sense of fragmentation and lack of connection between different issues.

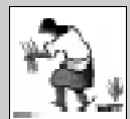
All states in South Asia have prepared National Plans of Action (NPA). Women's organisations have also been actively involved - in mobilisation, setting out programmes of action, designing strategies for monitoring and implementation of commitments made by governments. The extent to which these plans will resolve the fragmentation and inequalities in the region is arguable.

Victories through struggles

Women who achieved certain levels of education and employment struggled to break through the barriers that impeded their advancement, while working class women fought for the right for equal pay, paid maternity leave and benefits, and participation in trade union activity on equal terms with men. At policy and planning level women argued for recognition of women's work in the home and in social reproduction as well as in the 'informal' sector. An outcome of this is the efforts to make national databases gender specific.

Regional initiatives

At Regional levels women's formations have joined forces on different Platforms. The Asian Forum on Human Rights and Development (Forum – Asia) - facilitates linkages between mainstream human rights groups and women's rights groups. This is critical to develop an understanding of the common cause in the two spheres. Reproductive rights are also integrated into a human rights framework as a key issue in the Forum. The slogan "Women's Rights are Human Rights" popularised during preparations for the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 was a useful concept and tool for women's groups in South Asia. The ability to locate violence against women within this framework has provided a way of addressing this issue.



New trends, initiatives and challenges

Coalitions of women's groups have been formed to monitor the implementation of CEDAW and to focus on changing national legislation to include CEDAW principles. Collaboration with other groups involved in struggles for social justice, has had positive results, but also created tensions due to different priorities and agendas.

Conceptualising violence against women

The reconceptualisation of violence as a human rights violation, led to a critical appraisal of the way mainstream human rights groups approached the issue. Human rights groups have become more gender sensitive in their work while women's groups started re-framing their work on legal reform and intervention in a human rights based approach. Offences against women during war (e.g. rape, forced impregnation and other forms of sexual violence) have been classified as "war crimes" by the International Criminal Court, and the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice (which included South Asian women) played an important role in this. Moreover linking women's experience of violence on a daily basis to the militarisation of society in general, prompted women to be more involved in the broader struggle for democratisation and social justice.

However some human rights groups remain resistant to other issues important to women, such as family law, including law governing marriage, divorce, maintenance, child custody and inheritance (as many of these are shaped by religion, culture and tradition), as well as trafficking, abortion and sexual harassment. Another positive outcome of lobbying and advocacy at the international level was the appointment of Sri Lanka woman lawyer (Radhika Coomaraswamy) as the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Her work on trafficking of women, the use of culture and tradition to justify violence against women and the use of violence against women in times of conflicts has created the space for these issues to be raised at national and regional levels, as well as for national legislation (India and Sri Lanka) on domestic violence.



Global interaction led women's South Asian groups to enlarge their activism to cover a wider range of issues: legal aid counselling, provision of shelters/safe houses, challenging laws and practices through legal means, launching of public and media campaigns.

Conceptualising reproductive health and sexual rights

The UN declaration that the availability of safe abortions was critical to achieve safe motherhood was a turning point in reproductive health and justice. However the implementation of this declaration leaves much to be desired. In this regard women need more nuanced approaches to women's reproductive health and sexual rights in their engagement with the International Planned Parenthood Federation and population control agencies.

Exclusion and discrimination

In the past women were a part of other struggles (e.g. anti-colonial struggles, nationalist movements, trade unions, minority groups, etc.) but there was no clear consciousness of the commonality of struggles against oppression. When women's issues were taken up these were as mothers and caregivers. Women today are forging links with dalits, indigenous people, religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities, refugees, gays and lesbians, people living with HIV/AIDS, to take up common concerns. This focus on issues of discrimination, oppression and exploitation results in new social movement formation and activism. As a result of such interactions, these organisations pay greater attention to women's participation and raise greater gender awareness. In India for example there is greater awareness of the connections between caste-based oppression and gender subordination. Likewise, in Pakistan, the tensions between different religious groups have raised awareness of the links between religious fundamentalism and gender oppression.

Poverty and globalisation

Recent initiatives of women include a focus on macro-issues of poverty and strategies for poverty eradication and alleviation. Sustainable develop-



ment is an over riding concern, expressed through campaigns against projects that lead to deforestation, environmental degradation, landlessness, debt cancellation, the reclamation of traditional healing and farming methods, and opposing the WTO's patenting of indigenous seeds and plants.

Peace and conflict resolution

Women in the region, both at national and regional level have focused on the peaceful and negotiated settlement of conflicts. Attempts to mediate in the context of ethnic and religious conflict are dangerous. People who do so are labelled as traitors” and even pay with their lives. In addition, sections of the women’s movement in the region have developed a feminist critique of communalism and other forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, language or religion. Many have committed themselves to maintaining dialogue across the different divides, and in the field of mass communication and creative arts women and cultural workers have evolved a wide range of materials that convey ideas of harmonious coexistence.

Using “Motherhood” to unite in conflict

The “Mother’s Front” was created in July 1990 by women of the Sinhala majority community in Sri-Lanka, to protest against the disappearance of some sixty thousand young and middle aged men. Over twenty five thousand women were estimated members of this front and the non-threatening idiom of motherhood was used effectively to confront the state and to mobilize women’s support. The significance of the Mother’s Front lies in its emerging in a backdrop of a country devastated by ethnic conflicts and reprisals that paralysed the nation during the brief period during of its political life. By its actions, the Front, “opened up the space in which a much larger, non-racist and more radical protest movement could be launched” and simultaneously “gendered the discourses of human rights and dissent”⁷

The new discourse on governance

With the collapse of governance in the last 50 years, there is an ongoing debate about the nature and the form of the state, what constitutes good



governance and the role of civil society in promoting new forms of democratic governance. Not only governance of the country but of civil society groups themselves, with focus on accountability, transparency and shared decision-making. As states have become more repressive and authoritarian, civil society movements are in more precarious positions. States in the region have instituted laws and policies that monitor and control activities of NGO's. Freedom of information and expression has been curbed on the grounds of 'national security'.

The failure of governance has in turn led to the hardening of identities and intensification of conflicts. Any attempt to discuss governance in such a context inevitably leads to the need for a critique on processes related to the decentralisation and devolution of power.

The feminist dilemma

In the 1990's fewer women's groups want to identify themselves as feminists or with feminist analysis of society. This could be as a result of feminists being identified as "western" or alienated from their society. Or because they experience difficulty in taking on the challenge posed by modernity and globalisation. While there have been studies and research on the impact of globalisation on women's economic status and on the impact and growth of religious fundamentalism and national chauvinism on the social status of women, these have been too few and too specific in many cases.

The symbolic disappearance of words such as "liberation" and "emancipation", oppression, and exploitation, patriarchy and feminism may explain this phenomenon, especially when one considers the word and term that seems to have replaced them: gender. As it first appeared and was used in an analytical framework that embraced the concept of patriarchy and looked at gender relations as being relations of power, it was an invaluable tool. However as it is used now, by development agencies and government bureaucrats it has been stripped of its analysis of power relations and is therefore depoliticised)

Among the challenges that confront the feminist movement in South



Asia is that of renewing its linkages and connections to other social movements from a perspective that deals with diversity in a democratic manner. Although in the context of identity politics in the region- it becomes extremely difficult to promote unified fronts on common concerns. Although in recent years feminists have begun to use the human rights framework as a basis for discussing issues of equality and difference. They also propose returning to concepts of discrimination and disadvantage to provide insights into the understanding of equality that postulates “equal” as being the “same”⁸.

Another difficult process in South Asia has been that of forging links with the state (e.g. policy making) – overcoming traditional resistance to links with the state is a critical issue. As the state withdraws from its role of provider of services and protector of rights, various community-based organisations have no option but to step in to provide basic services which carries the danger of becoming part of the system and losing the capacity to remain autonomous and critical.

Feminist movements, social movements and the state: Perspectives from South East Asia⁹

When we speak about social movements in the region, we cannot ignore the political realities prevailing in these societies. This is particularly so in countries where the state is playing a role that increasingly impinges upon the interests of social movements and citizens. South East Asian governments, with the exception of Burma, were said to be democratic. However in many instances such democracies do not genuinely work. In the past few years, the citizenry and social movements in South East Asia have found themselves increasingly confronted with a political context in which the military and the ruling elites are becoming more powerful.

Authoritarian governments and people’s resistance

It is worth citing Malaysia as an example to show the nature of social movements



within an authoritarian state. Popularizing the slogan Malaysia Boleh, which literally means 'Malaysia is capable of', the 17-year old Mahathir administration has "an armoury of laws which provide for detention without trial and restrictions over basic freedoms of expressions, association and public assembly" to support its authoritarian state (Malaysian Human Rights Report 1998).

In the 1990s, social movements had to re-consolidate themselves and to contend with the state in the context of an economic “boom” driven by the increased liberalisation and globalisation of the economy. Most of the NGOs focused on their own issues, and were generally low-key, with the exception of a few groups such as those fighting for the urban poor and human rights issues. Being middle-class and urban-based meant that the outreach of these NGOs, including women’s groups, were limited to the English-speaking population. Nonetheless there were attempts to broaden civil society, one of which was the effort to network between these NGOs and opposition political parties to form Gagasan Rakyat (People’s Coalition) towards the middle half of 1990. With the bursting of the “bubble economy” in late 1997, the state was again put on the defensive with the unleashing of underlying tensions and conflicts, both economically and politically.

The incarceration in September 1998, of the Deputy Prime Minister and the host of sinister events that followed angered the broad Malaysian public. This led to a spontaneous outburst against the state. Particularly for the Malay masses, the public shaming of such a high profile leader led to a crisis of legitimacy of the state. Gerak (Move) came into being; a movement led by the opposition Islamic-based party in alliance with other more conventionally Muslim-based NGO’s and with the Gagasan Rakyat. With the swift unfolding of events, one after the other, these movements, generally called the Reformasi movement separated into two, but interrelated streams.

The Philippines in 1998 demonstrated that it was indeed Asia’s showcase of democracy (FEER Asia 1999). While speculations thrived that the May 1998 polls would see bloodshed, the masses voted a popular movie star, Joseph Estrada to replace six-time President Fidel Ramos. This, de-



spite the fact that the country's business elite, the Catholic Church, the media and even the military were all against Estrada.

The semblance of democratic and popular participation is a reflection of the long history of people's resistance, initially against Spanish rule and American colonialism and later the Marcos' dictatorship. There are four major social movements in the Philippines, which must be understood against this political backdrop. Those operating underground are the Communist Party (including its New People's Army, and the National Democratic Front, organizations) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and its fractions. Those that are above ground include the NGO's and the cooperatives.

Market socialism: Social movements in shield

For countries in transition, namely Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, the situation of one-party-based governments, did not permit independent non-governmental initiatives. The existing NGOs are either local, aligned to the state or Western NGOs that are allowed to work within the government's framework. It is difficult then to speak of social or women's movements, as such, which are not part or autonomous of the state apparatus. However, it seems that there are now emerging pockets of such groups and their impact remains to be seen.

In search of democratic space: Burma under a military regime

In Burma, the NGO's are either working underground or in exile since there is no democratic space to manoeuvre. The present military leadership body called the State Peace and Development Council tolerates no opposition and will do anything it feels necessary to repress any activities and movements that threaten its power. A telling illustration is the bloody crackdown on anti-government demonstrations against one-party rule and socialism in August and September 1988. Thousands of civilians were killed across the country.

The army, led by General Saw Maung, formed the State Law and Order



Restoration Council (Slorc) and assumed direct control of the state. Consequently, the new military government abolished the old socialist system and promoted a free-market economy. It also organised a general election in May 1990. The National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory for the main opposition party. The junta's reaction was to place Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest and detained scores of NLD leaders, while many others fled from Burma to exile in Thailand.

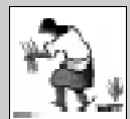
Effectively, this means that there are no overt social movements at all in Burma. There is, however, a pro-democracy movement in Burma although it is not a well-organized one. These groups have to work underground and, if the various groups want to collaborate, they must be very cautious because of the extensive spy networks of the junta.

Women's movements in South East Asia

The women's movement in the South East Asian region has many faces. Historically, women have been part of anti-colonial and nationalist movements. These can be distinguished as the left and right wing traditions. Women were also active in labour movements and played an important role in the struggle for the amelioration of the condition of workers. In the post-colonial period, women's movements range from women's wings of political parties, both right and left, government-sponsored women's groups, to non-governmental women's organisations. The latter again range from service-oriented bodies, which are more mainstream in nature to the more activist groups that can be said to be more feminist and progressive. Political ideologies create tensions within women's groups, as in the Filipino case. Some of these tensions evolve around the nature of women's engagement with the state.

Women's movements and the state

Feminist theorising of the state, to date, has been limited. Nonetheless, recent writings reflect a rethinking of the state as a more complex entity rather than as essentially patriarchal and/or capitalist and serving the unitary interests of men or capital (Tan, 1996).¹⁰ In an interesting article Connell



(1994),¹¹ points out that:

“The state is constructed within gender relations as the central institution of gendered power. Conversely, gender dynamics are a major force constructing the state, both in the historical creation of state structures and in contemporary politics”.

In deconstructing the state as a historical process and as a structure of power, Connell argues that since it is a site of political struggle, it becomes a focus of interest group formation and mobilization in sexual politics. Subsequently, the concern of feminism to capture a share of state power is a necessary response. He then poses the key question – “(the question) is not whether feminism will deal with the state, but how: on what terms, with what tactics, towards what goals?” Furthermore because the state is constantly changing and its position on gender politics not fixed, it allows for gender dynamics to intervene in its development. He further points out that “crisis tendencies develop in the gender order which allow new political possibilities”.¹²

Feminists’ engagement with selected political regimes in South East Asia comprises different modes that include, confrontation, co-operation and representation. The process of confrontation results in a more militant and distant stance against the state, while that of cooperation entails working with the state along certain issues, mainly for policy changes. The third mode, that of representation, seeks political participation in the state, for example during elections, through political parties. Throughout these years, some strategies had (limited) success, others less so. We argue that the future of the women’s movement will lie not in seeking legitimacy with the state, but in mobilizing both within, but more importantly so, outside the state apparatus, and in alliance with other democratic movements.

The Malaysian experience: Restricted democracy

Mobilisation-confrontation

Confrontational politics, the Prime Minister reprimanded Malaysians, in the wake of the recent mass demonstrations regarding the alleged arsenic



poisoning of Anwar, is not part of Malaysian culture (The Star, Harakah, 20 September 1999). He continued bluntly that those who did so would face the consequences of the law. In fact, to prove the point, those who demonstrated were met with the wrath of the state. To a certain extent, mass mobilisation on a regular basis against the state has not occurred as part of Malaysian political dissent. But to say that it is not part of Malaysian culture is to obfuscate the issue, as there have been such types of mobilizing from the anti-colonial movements to the resistance by NGO's and women's groups. In terms of women's demands, we cite three such occasions - two of which met with repressive actions and one which succeeded to push forward the implementation of a Bill passed two years earlier.

The first occasion was the mass mobilisation of women in the anti-colonial struggle, including the struggle against the Malayan Union proposed by the British. Participation of women was eagerly sought by both the left and right wing parties in order to "add strength to the party to push for independence".¹³ However the colonial state came down heavily on the growing left-wing movement, and these groups were banned, including the Women's Federation and AWAS, the Conscious Women's Front. Many of the women were either detained, fled or were banished to China and Indonesia, or went underground to join the Communist Party.¹⁴ Interestingly, the demands of these progressive groups ranged from sexual equality to the establishment of child care facilities and freedom from sexual harassment.

The second instance was the rapid mobilisation of women activists in the 1980s – a period of the establishment of progressive NGO groups and confrontation against the state along a broad range of issues as discussed above. Women activists while participating in such campaigns, also mobilised around an anti-rape campaign, leading to a mass demonstration in 1987 as the result of the brutal rape-cum-murder of a nine year old girl. The campaign was led by a coalition called Citizens Against Rape (CAR) made up of NGO and welfare groups in the country, that included both men and women.



The CAR campaign did not last very long as the NGO movement became engulfed in the political crisis leading to the mass detention of activists in 1987. As a result, four women activists, three of whom were in the Women's Development Collective, one of the groups spearheading the VAW campaign, were among the forty who were given indefinite detention – their charges being the mobilisation of workers and women to overthrow the state. Thus was aborted a growing movement for democratisation. Nonetheless the amendments to the laws regarding rape were passed rather swiftly in 1989, in part due to the media blitz on the subject and the continued mobilizing by women's groups.

The third instance of confrontation, albeit on a milder note, was the handing over of a memorandum and the subsequent demonstration to the Minister in charge of Women's Affairs on March 8, 1996, to demand the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act. This strategy was used as women's NGO's were getting quite frustrated that the implementation of the Act was being delayed despite the Bill having been passed in Parliament in 1994 – after years of lobbying. As recently noted by a journalist:

*“Three years ago, in an episode so unusual for placid Malaysia that it made headlines, women activists marched across a hotel lobby chanting “Act now, right now” and confronted a startled cabinet minister. The tactic worked: A law to protect battered women was implemented after 11 years of lobbying”.*¹⁵

Cooperation or accommodation: Uneasy politics

Compared to other laws, perhaps none other than the Domestic Violence Act has been claimed to be the result of successful lobbying of women's groups of all persuasions in the country. Women's NGO's both mainstream and alternative, and women's wings of political parties, have listed the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act as one of their main success stories in fighting for women's rights. Indeed one of the woman candidates prided her role in lobbying for the Act when she was recently campaigning to head the Women's Wing of one of the ruling political parties. Such ap-



appropriation is of course not new; however what is interesting to note is the broad alliance formed among women's groups and the state in drafting the Act, including the strengths and weaknesses of such an alliance.

The process of negotiating and contesting differences among varied vested interest groups, while useful in creating alliances at one level, worked to the detriment of the feminist cause.

Electoral politics and the women's agenda: Limits of representation?

The third mode of feminist engagement with the state is by entering the foray of electoral politics through representation. Connell points out that this structure of state power, that is a system of representation socially organised along gender lines – electoral patriarchy – is surprisingly resilient. However in the Malaysian context, electoral politics while gender biased, has been mainly contested along ethnic lines. Furthermore, the electoral system is based on the principle of “first past the goal” rather than through proportional representation based on the actual quantity of votes garnered. Electoral constituencies in Malaysia are also not evenly distributed as gerrymandering has been used to ensure that opposition seats have as high as 400 per cent of voters more compared to the loyalist seats. Despite this inequality, the women's movement entered this field of play, beginning with the 1990s general elections.

In fact for the first time in electoral history, there have been forums organised by the opposition where only female politicians speak. As observed “the run-up to the country's latest elections is seeing a marked politicisation of women's issues. The entry of Wan Azizah as a leading icon of opposition forces ... is feeding into the imagination of the public that gender may count after all”.¹⁶ Thus lie the limits to the politics of representation which is circumscribed by the parameters of electoral patriarchy.

Issues and dilemmas within the women's movement:

Philippine s' democratic transition

Prior to the split in the left in 1994, there was a broad, multi-sectoral and 'political colourful' women's movement in the country. Within this realm,



there were two identifiable strands of the women's movement – the liberal reformist strand (which did not directly address class issues but was progressive on the human rights and democracy front) and the left-leaning strand that included the militant women's network GABRIELA. This broad women's movement formed a common front against the repressive Marcos dictatorship and the puppet National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women then.

The then broad women's movement was pressurised as it found some of its former members and leaders now occupying government positions while the rest continued to use the streets and maintained its critical, and often confrontational position to the government. Nevertheless, the new-found but feeble democratic space enabled a variety of women's organizations to voice various concerns in public and to use new techniques in political advocacy. One of these was lobbying for a change of laws as it was felt that the state could be a space in which reforms beneficial to women can be lobbied.

Within this "old" paradigm, a third strand cropped up. This was called the "autonomous feminist" strand which came out of the left-leaning strand. Its political position was to carve out not an independent but an autonomous women's movement, in that it would decide on its own feminist agenda in a way that is inter-linked with the nationalist and democratic agenda of the left-leaning strand.

Violence against women, reproductive rights and sexual rights were issues that the members of this group believed were legitimate women's issues/demands but which were being given secondary attention in the analysis and advocacy of left leaning women's groups, including GABRIELA. It also believed more than the left leaning groups, that legislative advocacy and lobbying could benefit women, particularly the passage of new laws that gave women the right over many aspects and privileges denied them under the existing laws.



Women's movement and the Filipino State

There seem to be visible shifts in how the progressive women's movement is presently engaging with the state. The first is the acknowledgement of the importance and integration of "the political is personal" dictum into the realm of advocacy, while the second is the entry into electoral politics.

As relatively new players, women's groups also realised that the political arena was wide and varied, and that engagement in this arena was one strategy of addressing women's concerns. Women can be involved in politics as elected officials and as advocates of women's issues, but this demands that women actively seek positions of formal political authority through elections to better fulfil their agenda.

The liberation and caring for the self in the midst of struggle is a new kind of politics in the Philippines. In the old tradition of left politics, the rule of thumb was to sacrifice oneself in the name/for the liberation of the masses. For women who for the most part had no real choices and whose loyalty to their husbands through thick or thin was based on political conviction, there is now an urgent need to control one's life and to rid oneself of male dominance. There are now activist women and feminist socialist women who are addressing patriarchy in their personal life circumstances. They are also more responsive to the desire of grassroots women to control their lives, even while in the midst of a political struggle for a collective cause.

Women's political participation and advocacy: Representation for whom?

The second discernible shift is the entry of women, either as part of women's groups or in an individual capacity, into the state machinery. With the need to re-conceptualise feminism, there seems to be a tacit acceptance of such 'femocrats'. No one, for example, renounced the decision of a number of feminists to run during the 1998 election. If anything, they were encouraged and morally supported and questions/accusations of co-optation and accommodation seem to be less of an issue now. Those who were elected, along with other male activists, are now seen as allies within the state apparatus.



Class interests in women's organisation s

The socio-civic women's groups were generally less critical of the status quo; tend to prioritise the elimination of discrimination of women in politics; were less involved in community organising of grassroots women beyond specific political or economic objectives (e.g. credit distribution or putting up local chapters); and less concerned with the label 'feminist'. They were largely career professionals, business women and/or former public servants.

On the other hand activist women's groups strongly called for reforming the existing political and economic systems. They addressed gender equality issues in conjunction with the need for broader social equity and engaged community women more intensively and on a longer-term basis. They were also more conscious and articulate of their feminist identity and heritage. Such women were known leaders of mass organizations, most notably human rights, peasants' trade unions and students' groups.

Looking at specific issues, three primary social problems were addressed by the different agendas for women put forward by groups or parties to the voting public. These were poverty, women's political marginalisation and violence against women and children. Activist-oriented parties promised to address overall poverty, women's economic burdens, rural women's low income and unemployment, and growth with equity.

Why was the issue of reproductive rights invisible in the party list electoral agenda? Was the issue highly divisive, and if so, among whom – was it among ordinary women voters, between men and women voters, or among the women and men of the parties themselves? Or is it simply because the feminist oriented or feminist influenced groups were not prepared to confront the electoral base of the powerful conservative churches?

Mobilizing for transformation: Within and without

What have been the learning experiences of these years of feminist engagement with the state? It can be said that gender democracy and social justice can only be won through a continuous combination of mobilizing within



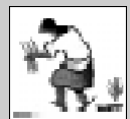
and without the state, albeit with an intensification of mobilizing outside the instruments of state power. This is because the politics of legitimacy through cooperation and representation have proved to be limiting to the wider feminist cause.

In Burma, it can be seen that confrontation against an oppressive regime seems to be the only choice available to male and female activists. Perhaps, as can be learnt from the Filipino experience, the women's movement in Burma, particularly those in exile, can emerge out of the pro-democracy movement.

Interestingly, the struggles of the women's movement in the Philippines and in Malaysia seem to be converging. Historically, Malaysian women have fought mainly within the realm of advocacy and legal reform on VAW issues, since confrontational politics have limited results, not least due to state repression. Recently women have also entered the political fray, participating in electoral politics although there is still much distrust of the undemocratic state. In the Philippines, due to the opening up of the democratic space, as well as of ideological discourse, including a re-questioning of gender and feminist thinking, sexual politics are now seen as politically correct, while entry into the state machinery is perceived as strategically 'worth trying for'.

Confrontation with the state, both from the women's and social movements have yielded some results – but at a price. Contrary to Connell's argument that crisis tendencies within the state might evoke some leverage and opportunities for women to transform existing sexual politics, the tendency of authoritarian states has been to repress and intimidate, rather than to negotiate and reform.

Thus, the women's movement can only find some leverage from the patriarchal state if there is a critical mass of women in decision-making positions who are sympathetic to the women's cause as well as the vision of a democratic society.



Feminist movements and the state in Latin America¹⁷

The feminist movement could be, at the same time, a social movement and a political expression in pursuit of full citizenship and of a democracy comprising from particular to global aspects. At a very early stage, it was articulated with the growing and massive women's popular movement. Its main task was to recover the difference and the political nature of women's subordination in the private sphere and its impact on the public sphere.

Dealing with a great deal of issues, Latin-American and Caribbean feminism developed a great number of organizations, action, themes and identity networks, and also promoted a transnational dynamic through several modes. The most significant expression of this was the Regional Feminist Meetings, at first every two years and, lately, every three years.

The democratization of the continent together with international changes brought about modifications to feminist movements making them more open to national, regional as well as global interactions. The United Nations Summits contributed to this. Democracy and citizenship turn into new courses of action. This is essential in interacting with the states.

Vargas identifies the present fragmentation and distortion of Latin-American feminism, relating them not only to social movements' cycles but also to the fragmenting impacts of globalization and neo-liberalism. Added to this, the feminists of the nineties express themselves basically through the work and agendas of feminist NGO's. Although some may have less external funding, with full-time professionals, NGOs, are able to have more visible processes and strategies than other groups.

Civil society, states and feminist relations

The region is characterised by complex relationships between feminism and States, on the one hand, and between civil society and the State, on the other hand. These relationships are conflictual but contribute to the building of social movements' and citizenship. Economic modernization and



democratization are the characteristic processes of the region, but they have different logics, which run parallel. Since there is no correspondence between them, democracy appears as a legitimating mechanism of modernization, giving priority to the market, to the detriment of citizens' interests. Thus, the challenge is how to attain processes of political restructuring with social transformation.

Feminists have moved beyond regarding the State as a homogeneous, patriarchal and capitalist entity to understanding it as a complex site. The State is a group of arenas, discourses, institutions, the result of political struggles and specific contexts, the coherence of which can be established throughout time, but it is changing. At present, the transnational integration produced by globalization overwhelms State organization. Moreover national states seem to be too small to tackle the global problems.

The deep heterogeneity of civil societies, with unequal development, and different values, proposals, organizational forms and practices result in diverse and multiple relationships between states and movements. A characteristic of new democracies in Latin America is the growing depoliticisation of civil society.

Despite this the multiple and varied relationships feminist movements have with the state and social movements create opportunities, risks and tensions. As identified by Vargas, these include:

- the contradictions and deficits of Latin-American democracies in the neo-liberal period because, on one hand, there is a new language of citizenship and rights, yet with a different comprehension of the content of democracies and citizenship;
- the perspectives of progress in formal equality mechanisms for all women are broadened and, at the same time, those possibilities depend on the political and economical interests of governments and states;
- the states are, both, a powerful tool for the production of equality and also a source of reproduction of inequalities;
- there is a "re-masculinisation" of the state and politics through, for example, poverty alleviation programs and military threats, and a



depoliticisation of social movements caused by their relationship with the states, among other reasons.

The two most important poles of Latin-American feminism of the nineties are the struggle for institutionalization and autonomy. These should not be considered as absolutes but as permanently changing elements influenced by the environment. Vargas further considers these processes an expression of two cycles: a cycle of the movement itself and a cycle of citizens' participation.

In such a complex and contextual discourse, the tension between equality and difference appears again, and, for feminism, this implies a way of regrouping and a way in which strategies are externally displayed. During the eighties feminism had a complementary vision of equality and difference. This resulted in specific proposals based on new ways of relating in the public sphere, the political sphere and the State.

Vargas asserts that feminist movements do not only focus on power or identity, both are present in the poles but with different weight at different moments. There is concern about the paradox that sometimes being successful also implies losing control over the feminist project because of the dictum that 'he who rules the system is the one who declares the equality of the other one'.

The first pole defends early feminist practices, of contributing to self-identities and resists any possibility of negotiating with the public/political sphere. The second one cautiously assumes the importance of negotiating with the society and the State. These two distinctions and critical visions derive, both, from the inside of the most institutionalized expression and from the dissident organizations of those stances. Both criticisms raise the risks of engaging the state but do not agree on the strategies. The most radical positions however still oppose strategies of engaging in the public/political sphere.

Feminist movements: Autonomy and engagement

This leads us to the problem of feminist movements' autonomy and, in broader terms, to the autonomy of civil society in relation to the State.



Again Vargas identifies different ways through which women's formations can retain their autonomy and yet negotiate with the state. But the question remains how to assume leadership positions and an autonomous agenda precisely when movements are diffuse and macro-dynamics emphasise fragmentation? In trying to understand this feminists in Latin America highlight the following:

- Autonomy is neither a static political principle nor delinked from reality, but a concept and a dynamic and flexible practice related to the environment;
- so as not to have only an identity of “resistance”, we must form part of broader democratic projects.

The feminist agenda must have aspects that do not consolidate only one kind of women, likewise, equality is not isolated from the diversities of the same women. In this way, there are more possibilities of having democratic alliances with the same women and with other movements and actors.

The construction of autonomous profiles of feminism should be emphasized in feminist spheres and in democratic civil society. This would help to establish alliances with different democratic sectors and create a “space for contestation”. This type of interaction with the state does not do away with the state's responsibility to acknowledge rights and ensure their execution. Civil society and the movements that form part of it, also have to identify antidemocratic arrangements as a problem and continue the struggle for citizen rights.

Claiming space and transforming the arena

That there is a coexistence of different ideological projects in the State and also in specific institutions addressing women is unarguable. However with institutional weaknesses and low allocations from national budgets, the demand to engender equality policies is constrained. Further engendering the state and society to ensure women's emancipation should not exclusively depend on women having a “room of their own.” This marginalises



women from the centre of power and reduces their capacity to transform institutional power from within.

Feminism, the women's movement and the state: Perspectives from Africa¹⁸

Hassim (1999) points out that feminists have held ambivalent views about the state. "On the one hand, the state is regarded in different contexts as masculinist, racist, repressive and/or excluding. On the other hand, much of feminist advocacy in the policy arena has involved demanding an expansion of the roles of the state in the provision of services and in the establishment of a juridical framework which would mitigate the gendered impacts of capitalism". The first position is reflected in feminist literature on the impact of structural adjustment policies on women. It explains how women are controlled and regulated by the state. The second position is reflected by their calls for the state to be more inclusive and analyses seeking to determine ways of influencing state policies and policy-making processes.

Changing notions of the state

Feminists in Africa point to shifts in understanding the state. The earliest feminist view of the state was that of a benevolent organization, in which the officials were right and the perspective was right. But this unproblematic view of the state was questioned later by scholars, notably those who wrote on women and the state in the Third World.¹⁹ This critique led to examinations of the ways in which the state articulates its ideologies on women. Currently, there are two feminist viewpoints about the role of the state. First, there is the liberal feminist view that frames the state as a neutral arbitrator captured by men. The solution to this problem is to ensure the inclusion of women in state institutions and the creation of formal equality. Second, there is the Marxist feminist view of the state, where it is analysed as an instrument of bourgeois male domination.



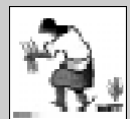
The feminists' position in Africa differs from the above liberal feminist and Marxist positions because demands for women's participation and representation in the region stemmed from long histories of women's involvement in liberation struggles. Some argue that the weak nature of the state in terms of institutional development and infra-structural capacity means that many women barely experienced positive impacts of social policies and service delivery. "In these situations, localized alternative states some times emerged under authority of local traditional leaders or warlords, producing complicated patterns of allegiance and patronage". These alternative states exist side by side with the formal state.

Complex relationships with the state

A more critical understanding of the complex nature of women's relationship to the state has to be developed than that offered by conventional feminist theory. Given women's contradictory experiences of the state as both benevolent and regulating, Hassim suggests that feminists might need to consider the post-structural notion of the dispersal of power. Post-structuralists view the state as being dispersed in its apparatuses of social control, maintaining control through the reproduction as well as the production of dominant discourses. The state can also be viewed as a cultural form where women as a category of social actors do not stand outside of its formation, but are actively shaped by public policy and other cultural forms.²⁰

Civil society substituting state functions?

Key in redefining the relationship of women's and feminist movements with the state are the different levels of engagement with different forces and institutions. Hassim proposes that feminists do not only seek to increase women's representation in the state but also aim at uncovering the hidden ways in which institutions and state policies (as well as counter-policies advocated by women's organizations) constitute the particular interests of different groups of women. She points out that the impact of structural



adjustment in many parts of Africa has been to replace the state functions with privatized/international development NGOs, but these NGOs are not gender neutral regardless of their progressive content.

Feminist and democratic transition in South Africa

The transition to democracy led to a change in women's organizations from an oppositional stance to that of engagement with the state as a key locus for redress of gender inequalities. In South Africa, women's organizations feel confident that the state will effect change due to the activism of women in ANC over a number of years. When transitioning from Apartheid, there was a focus on preparing institutions to consolidate and sustain democracy. Hassim argues that the designing of new democratic structures provided the opportunity for demands for mechanisms to promote gender equity.

She indicates that "the package of arrangements that was created to take account of gender in the constitution and the state institutionalized women's politics by drawing into formalized structures and processes of interacting with other stakeholders which are routine, repeatable and formalized. The intention behind institutionalization is to ensure that gender concerns are integrated or mainstreamed into the everyday work of government – procedures, policy formulation and service delivery". Currently, women's concerns are channelled inside government through the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) and in civil society through the Commission of Gender Equality (CGE). Representatives of constituencies of women are organized in the Parliamentary Women's Group and through the Joint Standing Committee for Improving the Quality of Life and Status of Women.

According to Hassim, these structures and processes have made the state more permeable to the influence of organized constituencies of women. Although social movement theorists see institutionalization as having the effect of demobilizing civil society, Hassim argues that this happens on short-term basis. She posits that in the long-term demobilization does not appear to be sustained in the case of South Africa. Rather at the end of five years, organized activities in South Africa were defending gains they had won and challenging the government on key policy issues. On the basis of the South African situation, Hassim proposes that a "more nuanced view of relationship between engaging the state and the impact on the women's movement is necessary". Hassim gives an example of how the African National Congress party's use of quota has contributed greatly to the 25% female representation at parliament level.



Civil society, state and women

Mama (1999) reflects that “civil society has increasingly been conceptualized as an alternative to the failings of bad government and heralded as an important site of governance, the engine for democratization and viewed as offering a panacea for all the weaknesses and failings of the state.” However, she cautions feminists about civil societies and she asks “How realistic is this view? On what evidence or knowledge about civil society is it based? What does a gender perspective bring to the theory and practice of civil society?” The majority of community associations, non-governmental organizations and social movements in Africa have entrenched gender inequality in their institutional cultures and practices. Women’s organizations have been left to push for gender equality while mainstream civil society organizations have ignored them.

Collen Seegobin (1999) illustrates civil society and opposition party resistance to SAPs policies using the case of Mauritius. Women of the Muvman Liberayson Fam, an “All Women’s Conference on the Budget” with activists from women’s associations and unions, organized in 1997 to oppose price liberalization, privatization of social services and amenities and to struggle for rights such as free education, health care, pensions, and social security. She shows how the trade unions in Mauritius also blocked labour law changes that would have introduced upper ceilings to replace wage indexation that exists in Mauritius. She asserts that Mauritius still has basic rights including utilities because women’s organizations, trade unions and political parties have mobilized to stop the government from applying the conditions for loans it received.

Feminist organizations face constraints to gender transformation because of their current set up. Mama (1999) argues that post-colonial women’s organizations tend to be hierarchical in structure, dominated by elite women and dedicated to quiet and comparatively genteel politics of pursuing legal and policy reforms. She criticizes these organizations for their tendency to be co-opted or absorbed by the state because this results in their ineffectiveness as vehicles for women’s struggles. Furthermore, they



rarely retain their linkage with grassroots organizations and women whose interests they claim to represent.

Diaw (1999) argues that the politics of exclusion were the dominant mode in development strategies adopted right after independence. Although the post-independence state defined its mission as nation-building and development, women were ignored in both areas. It was only women's efforts to challenge the state that led to the institutionalization of structures to address women's concerns and interests.

Conclusions

Evidence suggests that feminists and the women's movement have a contradictory relationship with the state: we want to capture power to bring about transformation but we are uneasy with the way power plays itself out and with the forms of power that dominate political processes. So at individual and collective levels we have difficulty with accepting that power and leadership of different types is necessary to bring about change.

We need to engage with different forms of power at different stages in our struggle. If we want to bring about change we cannot be purists. Disengagement is not an option. Global space provides opportunities to express new ideas, recast democratic practices of women's movements and to push the advocacy agenda. It has resulted in the possibility of forming new strategic alliances at global levels to push gender equality to the core of political restructuring. Moreover it provides channels to consolidate a global system of guarantees of people's rights against which to hold national states accountable. Current trends indicate that feminist movements are using existing institutions to push for greater representation and the institutionalisation of gender.

Many challenges confront feminists as they attempt to grapple with the complex forces at play in the global, regional and national spheres. How can feminist movements that aspire to democratic forms of governance work with authoritarian systems of government? What are the conditions



under which the feminist/ women's movements can retain their autonomy from the state and still use political spaces for new gains? Feminist /women individually and as a collective need to determine how to engage with the state in order to change/ transform its policies, programmes and structures, and not to become co-opted into these. How to ensure accountability, transparency and representivity within the women's movement while at the same time push for these within the state is also a key challenge to the women's movement.

Notes

- 1 Commitment 1: The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action-World Summit for Social Development, 6-12 March 1995.
- 2 Feminist movement are also a part of the women's movement, but the term feminist, sets it apart in the variety that characterizes women's movement today. Feminist movements distinguishing characteristic is their interventions in "politics" at different levels to challenge various forms of patriarchy and gender injustice.
- 3 This section draws on Vanita Mukherjee, 2000, DAWN PRST Regional Synthesis: South Asia, Sunila Abeysekera, 1999 and Farida Shaheed, 1999, DAWN PRST South Asia
- 4 See Kumar R., 1999, Abeysekera S, 1999 and Shaheed F, 1999
- 5 There has been much difference of opinion about lobbying with members of Majlis-e-Shoora, Zia's handpicked nominated parliament.
- 6 The organisation was later renamed as "Forum Against Oppression of Women" (FAOW)
- 7 De Alwis 1998 quoted in Shaheed Farida 1999b
- 8 Sunila Abeysekera, 1999, DAWN PRST paper, South Asia
- 9 This section draws on a paper written by Cecilia Ng and Carol Yong, 2000, for DAWN PRST Research in South East Asia.
- 10 Tan, 1996
- 11 Cornell, 1994: p6
- 12 Cornell, 1994: 159-160
- 13 Maznah, 1999; Ng and Yong, 1990
- 14 Ng, \siti Nor and Syed Husin Ali, 1987
- 15 Chen, Wall Street Journal, 28 July 1999
- 16 Maznah, 1999:14



- 17 This section is based on research papers written for DAWN PRST Research in Latin America by Gina Vargas 1999 and Line Bareiro, 2000
- 18 This section draws on papers by Shireen Hassim 1999, Sheila Meintjies, 1999 prepared for DAWN PRST Africa research and the Africa Regional Report.
- 19 Afshar, 1987.
- 20 Brodie, 1995: 27.





Chapter 6

Feminists reclaiming governance: Alternative visions

“Reinventing global governance is not an option – it is an imperative for the 21st century.”¹

Introduction

Five years since the rhetoric of “good governance” was being bandied about during the World Summit on Social Development little has changed for the world’s poorest regions. For many the situation has worsened.

Hunger, poverty, unrestrained violence, wars, financial and political volatility, is the norm. We can now also speak of the “casino economy” as well as “casino political systems”, in which the powerful gamble with people’s lives.

In search for power and control emerging democratic processes are reversed overnight as in the cases of Fiji, Eritrea and Solomon Islands. Poor people, especially women are either bludgeoned into submission or become the ‘dice’ in a “game” that they can never win. Except that, as our analysis of politics and power, globalisation and the state, institutionalisation and social/feminist activism has exposed, this process is not a game for those who live in captivity. Whether it is captivity within the home, within the social, economic and political spaces or captivity of the spirit – it has tragic and dehumanising consequences. Reversing this process means we have to learn the rules of the “game” and change them.



With every commitment made at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, action was required at national and international levels. Governments came together to decide on how to contain and mitigate the effects of poverty, inequality, unemployment, how to accelerate the development of Africa and the least developed countries and “humanise” structural adjustment programmes. The protracted negotiations at the UN Preparatory Committees on “Further Initiatives” to address these problems is indicative of how little has changed. Feminists in the South affirm the need to ‘throw down the gauntlet’ against development agencies and IFIs that purport to provide aid but yet act in an unaccountable manner (see box overleaf). We support the efforts to transform the aid and trade regime.

While national governments are expected to be accountable, transparent and responsive to people’s needs, institutions of global economic governance remain unaccountable and unresponsive to the crises of governance that are features of our states. Alongside this, the demobilisation and depoliticisation of movements for change as they pursue “professionalism and adapt to new forms of managerialism” to maintain their donor bases, is also a concern.

Prospects for reclaiming governance

At different moments in the governance process there are points of historical convergence and disjuncture. These points provide strategic opportunities in the restructuring and transformation process that can be used to secure women’s rights for full social citizenship. There are many challenges confronting progressive social movements and feminists in efforts to reclaim governance for a socially just, environmentally sustainable and equitable development process. Our analysis indicates that women have complex, differentiated and varied relationships with the state and civil society. We therefore need to move beyond critical debates on governance to critical action. We must recast the political sphere (public and private) and realign movements and organisations to restructure and transform structures and systems that are oppressive, perpetuate national domination, discrimination and economic exploitation.



We speak of empowerment and transformation

The terms of and the discourse through which oppositional forces interpret their oppression and define options in specific contexts are not issues of merely abstract concern.² There is no end state in which women suddenly realise that they are politically empowered to counter their oppression. Political empowerment if it is to lead to social transformation must be a process through which women are able to secure the right to participate in the exercise of political and economic power through formal and civic institutions of governance to increase our power and control over our own lives. Further feminism must attack the material basis of economic, social and political inequality.³

There are various options through which women engage in political restructuring and social transformation. Feminists need to embrace power

Throwing down the gauntlet

At the 1995 Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from around the world pressed the view that the aid regime promoted by the international financial institutions – the World Bank, the IMF and the regional development banks – had failed to create employment, had deepened social inequality and poverty, and thereby fed social disintegration.

For more than a decade, NGOs have challenged the harsh economic measures of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), designed by these institutions and accepted by all the major donors, and have been public voices for alternative measures. NGOs and affected populations point to unsustainable resource exploitation, massive environmental destruction, population displacement, the undermining of food security and human centred development strategies, as among the impacts of SAPs and many of the projects undertaken by the IFIs (International Financial Institutions).

The Banks have recongised the importance of poverty reduction, environmental protection, citizen's participation in the development process, as well as institutional transparency and accountability, as core values and policies that are intended to shape the impact of their programmes. The World Bank has opened access to information and set out an appeal process for those affected by Bank projects. NGOs in recent years have continued to press for improvements in Bank accountability and to extend these policies to other arms of the Bank (for example, the International Financial Corporation) and to other institutions.



that is transformative in content and that will reclaim governance to ensure human rights and consensus at the centre. There are three ways of doing this. Through direct action, from below by building grassroots democracy and through a human rights culture.

Empowerment through direct action

Women's organisations, public policy processes and projects move through certain stages in the empowerment process as they interact with forces of domination. These stages may be reflected in a progression from sensitisation to consciousness and then critical analyses and action leading to social transformation. Practical examples of this have emerged in preceding chapters.

But policies alone, in the absence of fundamental institutional reform and linkage to the UN Charter and Treaties, will not be sufficient to ensure a systematic integration of the principles of sustainable and human development into economic and lending decisions. Populations affected by World Bank-supported infrastructural projects continue to press their case, with support from NGOs around the world. NGOs which actively lobby the IFIs are conscious of the need for more effective monitoring networks which will reveal the true impacts of IDA (International Development Aid) programs, recognising positive language in IDA 10 and IDA 11 replenishment agreements which aim to include poverty alleviation and reduction goals in all lending programs.

Donors are a long way from adopting, let alone implementing, NGOs' recommendations that 50 per cent of aid should go to social sectors. In eight out of 18 cases for which figures were available, developing countries' spending on total health and education exceeds 20 per cent. In not one case does the proportion of aid allocated to these sectors exceed 20 per cent.

Actually, the NGOs (and not the banks) were the institutions which showed more creativity and flexibility when fighting against poverty.

Source: *The World Guide 1997/98: A View from the South*, Instituto del Tercer Mundo. Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd.



Empowerment through building grassroots democracy

The other approach is one based on developing reciprocal relations between the power of the state and the power of civil society. This is done through a process of building grassroots democracy in which diversity and difference are given the space to articulate their interests and make decisions affecting them. This is different to liberal democracy, which protects the interests of those with economic power. How the state articulates with grassroots civil society and movements for change, would depend on the strength of such movements, and this can reflect new modes of democratisation. In this way feminists work to overcome the contradictions that are inherent in relationships of oppression as mediated by class, caste and race by working in dialogue with poor women, to analyse their own oppressive conditions and determine the terms of their interaction with the state. Such horizontal engagement should not detract feminists from the need to simultaneously engage with dismantling power at the top.

Empowerment through building a human rights culture

In some countries of the South the constitutional and legal framework has changed and provides institutional mechanisms through which women are able to secure their rights. However, accessing rights, understanding what they mean and being able to claim these rights are still part of the struggle. Women's experiences show that while the legal framework legitimates certain rights it also makes others invisible. Moreover, enforcement of these rights are determined by the extent to which the state's coercive machinery in the form of the police, army and judiciary are able to act in the interests of women. Examples highlighted that the police in some countries are the violators of rights. But the assertion of rights exposes women to negative reactions from the powers that be. These reactions include increases in institutional violence, fundamentalist backlash and restrictions on women's freedom to voice their views. To associate and to engage in activity that will advance issues of gender justice.



However the struggle for human rights in countries of the South has led to a new basis for inter movement organisation and mutual support. This provides some prospects for changing the discourse as well as the agenda beyond the state machinery. In other words, better articulation between movements can lead to better governance in civil society.

Beyond divided identities and fragmented states

Our prospects for reclaiming governance and promoting alternative visions would be negligible if we do not interrogate the subjective mental constructs. of identity, race, gender, nation, caste and class. The multiple identities of people can become situational categories used by activists on the right and left of the political spectrum to understand relations between people and how to change these. Women's experiences in the South demonstrate in painful ways how such ideologies of race, gender, ethnicity, and class are lived through. They become a way of fracturing societies to suite the interests of political, economic and religious elites. The challenge for feminists in to understand these divisions and the ways they are used to atomise social formations and thereby limit the power of mass mobilisation against repressive regimes.

Negotiated spaces and agendas

We need to systematically challenge and interrogate the democratisation process. Globally, experiences show that there are growing inequalities and that various forms of democracy have not led to poverty eradication. But there are "cracks in the edifice" of some global and regional decision making structures that can be used to lever spaces for alternative strategies. However, to negotiate in these spaces women's organizations and movements for change need to examine carefully the terms of incorporation into the state and its formations. We need to move away from a dualistic view of exclusion and inclusion that reduces our interventions to "either or" options. People are included in the system but on unequal terms and at the bottom. In the process of reclaiming governance women's participation must offer a different form of leadership and ethics.



A code of ethics for economic governance

Our analysis indicates that the state as an institution is an actor that chooses its relationships with diverse forces but while it may act independently, its unity or coherence should not be exaggerated. Currently states stand at the intersection between domestic, socio-political orders and transnational relations. “In the past states looked at their comparative advantage in relation to their internal strengths and how these could be used to maximise opportunities in the global trading system. In the context of globalisation states are more concerned with having a competitive edge. Simply put this means that industries have the ability to produce goods and services at the lowest labour costs. Thus now interests of citizens are deferred while interests of private enterprise and transnational corporations are prioritised on the assumption that this situation will promote investment and lead to national development. But this situation has resulted in few or no internal checks and balances to safeguard the interests of the poor.

Reclaiming the state for humane governance

The rolling back of the state in the form of deregulation from public interests to regulation and re-regulation in terms of private interests undermines democracy and development for poor women. Along with the less direct involvement of the state in reproduction and distribution of goods and services is the rise in state regulations and subsidies that promote an enabling environment for newly privatised industries. When institutions and public services like universities, electricity, transport and water are privatised, then access to basic needs is no longer guaranteed. In short, the state is reorganised to serve the interests of market forces rather than the dispossessed. This consequence of globalisation has been the expansion of the gap between the rich and the poor, and the rise of a new class, a class that is technologically rooted.



Power to support human development

Feminists have a contradictory relationship with the state. There is the recognition that power is necessary for change and gender transformation, but uneasiness with the way power plays itself out. In developing relationships with the state and civil society women in the South are able to work within the state to reform it, reluctantly complement the state as it divests itself of its responsibilities and confront or challenge the state. Some of the issues on which feminists engage include: the construction of gendered citizenship and the promotion of gender justice; an analysis of the impact of globalisation and on the gender division of labour and exploitation of women; expanding political spaces to use these strategically in the interests of poor women and people; analysing macro-economic policies to make them gender sensitive but also towards alternative economic frameworks. We cannot add gender or women to frameworks that have led to the exclusion of women in the first place and to the marginalisation of the majority of poor people – these are not transformative in content. Gender and state-based violence, both the violent nature of the economy and the economic nature of violence are being examined as an integral part of the political process.

Challenging the global economic institutions⁴

Feminists recognise that the WTO was created as a political instrument for the consolidation of the liberalised global economy. As such it is propelled by global corporate interests, as well as for the defence and promotion of continuing national economic and strategic interests of the most industrialised countries. Its terms and *modus operandi* are the product of self-serving and highly tendentious political processes. These processes are based upon and reflect a particular economic model or paradigm that favours the strong.

Awareness and criticism of this has been building up in developing countries over the past five years and reached a dramatic climax in Seattle.



This, in turn, produced a spate of high level declarations about the need for WTO 'reform', greater 'transparency' and 'inclusiveness'.

Women of the South call for:

- The reform of the WTO and guarantees of effective changes in the substance of its agreements.
- Further, the full review and revision of the WTO's rules and regulations and many agreements is also essential.
- Resistance to the introduction of (currently proposed or further) 'new issues' that would contribute to the expansion of the scope and powers of the WTO.
- The actual reduction of the scope, coverage and powers of the WTO by removing some agreements currently within its remit, such as TRIPS and cancelling others such as TRIMs and ensuring that others, such as food production, small scale agriculture, or artisanal fisheries remain outside of the trade-related 'disciplines' of the WTO.
- Relocation of many of the agreements currently subject to the trade terms and sanctions of the WTO and placing them instead within the ambit of appropriate specialised UN agencies, such as UNCTAD, UNDP, UNEP, UNIFEM or other dedicated international technical agencies
- Radically reducing the commanding role of the WTO in an emerging system of global government, to be replaced by a more pluralistic system of global governance based on a balanced - and mutually counterbalancing - range of more equal international economic, social, gender, environmental and other institutions, all of them regulated and guided by a framework of overarching global conventions and other international agreements⁵;

The process and the outcome of a mission and vision to transform global economic institutions will depend upon strategic alliances amongst developing countries that have general or specific interests in common. Or will rely on the basis of tactical alliances and trade-offs where they differ. However, it also means facing up to significant problems and serious chal-



lenges. These include differences of class, gender and other interests, of understandings and aims within the developing countries, as well as common 'national' interests. Moreover the dominant (elite) class interests cannot be accepted as being synonymous with 'national' interests.

Conclusions

The feminist movement and progressive organisations need to push to the centre of debate the issue that there are certain non-negotiables and these non-negotiables are the fundamental basic needs of people to survive. This is core to reclaiming and transforming the state for people centred development. What are the needs that should be met within our countries and what should remain integral to the responsibility of our governments? These are the needs for survival, food security, health care, education, the right to participate in decision-making that affects every sphere of our lives, work that is humanising rather than dehumanising that values one's contribution – no matter where one is located - are important considerations when we challenge the state.

We need to challenge the culture that dominates the governance debates and actions at every level in these processes. We need to understand the rules of the games that bring about winners, gainers and losers. And in our instances, women in the South have been the losers, in the tradeoffs that have taken place in the WTO and the economic systems of governance at the global level. As we reclaim governance and ensure that states act in the interests of their citizens we realise that the whole terrain is a shifting site of struggle. But as we engage in this process we need to ensure that the objectives of our collective struggles are not diffused and weakened. We reassert that the state is not a monolithic structure and that governance systems can be changed so that the dream of attaining personal liberation as well as national an international liberation can be achieved.



Notes

- 1 Human Development Report, 1999:97, United Nations Development Programme
- 2 Marx, A. 1992:6. Lessons of Struggle, Oxford University.
- 3 Walter, Natasha, 1999. The New Feminism, Virago Press.
- 4 Some of this section is an extract from Dot Keet's (2000) paper prepared for the DAWN PRST Inter-regional meeting, Cape Town
- 5 Walden-Bello, 2000



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