Notice: For the Development Bulletin Board

Attention: Researchers, donors, policy-makers, Northern feminists, Southern practitioners and other such-like

Sighted: 'New' African woman – not very poor, powerless or pregnant

A new African woman has recently appeared on the margins of the development stage. From reports received, this woman does not fit the usual stereotype that many of us have become used to in our work. Please find below a rough description of this new woman. You are all advised urgently to start looking out for her and to find ways of engaging and working with her. Please be warned that this woman is rather more complex than the old one we have come to know, whom we see as much more simple and straightforward. You are therefore advised to exercise the greatest of caution when you approach her and spend a bit more time understanding her.

Geographic location

This woman can be found in many countries of Africa, particularly the sub-Saharan region. At the local level, she can be found in rural villages or in the urban areas. She moves between the two locations with ease. It is difficult to say specifically if she is fully a resident of one of the two. Her work spans the two as well. Some of her work is directly in her own village, while some is in the urban area where she also lives. Lately she has been elected as a representative in her local government.

It is at national level, though, that she is most active and she also appears at the regional and international level. You are likely to see her presenting a keynote speech at a regional donor conference, or running round the lobbies of powerful international institutions lobbying policy-makers on the issues she is passionate about. The following week you will meet her again in the villages of her country, facilitating workshops, or organizing economic activities with resource-poor women.

Class and other social characteristics

The new woman is mostly middle to upper middle class – such as there is in sub-Saharan Africa. She is not very poor, nor can she be called very rich. Although she is relatively comfortable, in comparison to the majority of women in her communities, the new woman's comforts tend to be wiped out by the reality of her existence. For example, she is the one most likely shouldering the burden of HIV/AIDS; paying fees for orphans; buying anti-retrovirals for the infected and generally stepping in when governments and others fail.

denies me a space. I will therefore use this example in exploding the myth of the poor, powerless and pregnant African woman.

It is now a well-established fact that gender inequalities are driving the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Women's inability to protect themselves and exercise choices, sexual violence and the lower status accorded to women and girls are some of the many aspects of women's greater vulnerability to HIV. Research has clearly shown that it is also women who bear the disproportionate burden of care for the sick, and yet suffer a lack of access to treatment for themselves. All of these facts apply not just to resource-poor women in remote rural areas, they apply to all women regardless of all the variables that we know: class, location, age, and so on. The defining factor is unequal power relations between women and men. While resource poverty is an important factor, mediating the differences among classes of women, it is still a fact that generally most women experience unequal power relations regardless of class.

As a middle-class woman, I am intimately affected by HIV/AIDS. I find it as hard to negotiate safe sex as any other woman. I have the same fears about the consequences of my actions as any other woman. I am afraid of what society thinks of me, I am afraid of what my family will say, I do not want to be constantly seen as a bad woman. Sexual violence stalks me wherever I go. Even when I travel to what some would see as exciting places – out of my country, to conferences – I worry about my safety and security in hotel rooms. I personally do not sleep in any hotel room without pushing a chair against the door, just in case!

My class has not been spared from the reality of HIV/AIDS. We are both infected and affected. Of course there are no class-disaggregated statistics. Stigma still knows no boundaries. I constantly get pointed out as 'the one whose mother has lost three children to AIDS!' The burden of care and support for the affected and infected falls on the shoulders of the middle-class woman. She is the one with access to money, so she

pays fees for the orphan here, takes the dying relative to hospital the next day, and generally the whole clan looks to her to pay for everything that is needed. She even sponsors the funerals. If she is married she has to do this for her own family and for *his* family.

The bottom line, when it comes to a problem like HIV/AIDS, or violence against women is *I am the woman*. The issues I talk about are issues that I live with and experience. I am the one who mops up after everyone and on behalf of the state. I am the marginalized and oppressed. I am not working 'for' *the woman out there*, who is nameless or faceless. This is about me. I do not have to ratchet up 'grassroots women' to speak on behalf of, because I am that woman and I speak on my own behalf.

The big difference between development's favourite woman and me lies merely in the degree to which we each experience these problems. As they say, money does not buy happiness – but it helps; equally, education, geographic location and access to resources do not buy gender equality – but they help. It is important to note, though, that I am constantly hovering on the brink of becoming the poor woman in the posters because of something like HIV/AIDS or violence. Many of us have been reduced to a hand-to-mouth existence by the demands placed on us by those around us. Because we are still subjected to practices like property grabbing, there is the ever-present possibility of finding oneself as destitute as the mythical development target.

Silencing of the middle-class woman

Despite all of this, the middle-class woman is completely silenced and erased from the images of development and rights work. She is constantly reminded that development is about eradicating poverty and so it focuses on those defined as 'the poor' (read as resource-poor). Therefore her story and her experiences are not part of the narrative. In essence, this means women's lives are put in a kind of league table and it is those that qualify which get addressed.

If the non-poor woman dares give herself as an example, she is reminded that she is too distant from the lives of the *women out there* to matter. If she works in development, she constantly has to demonstrate how she is connected to the women at grassroots level. It is not acceptable to claim any knowledge of the issue/s at hand. Many a women's organization and its leadership have had to provide physical evidence of links with the grassroots poor. This can even go to ridiculous lengths; for example, women's rights NGOs have been forced to take 'their grassroots poor' to a UN meeting or international conference, just to prove their legitimacy.

The most disturbing aspect of all this is that none of these requirements is put on Northern feminists or other rights organizations. It is quite acceptable for a Northern academic feminist to present her paper in Beijing, or for her activist colleague to lobby the UN on HIV/AIDS. The world does not yet know how to deal with the articulate non-poor African feminist. Is it because she talks back? Is it because she does not fit the image of the charity case? As African feminists, we have learnt to laugh at the comment made by our Northern colleagues: 'Oh, you are *sooo* articulate, Everjoice!' We ask ourselves, what we were supposed to be? Incoherent?

The dual identity

Because for many years the work of the African middle-class activist has had to focus on and be based in rural poor areas, she has one foot at the micro-level and the other in macro-spaces. This dual identity can only result in schizophrenia! It becomes extremely difficult to hone one's skills and expertise.

'Villagization' of non-poor activists has resulted in the often-heard refrain, 'Africa has no policy analysis capacity'. The results are all too visible; it is still largely Northern academics or feminists who write and get published; it is their work which is used by policy-makers and is quoted in international media. The 'village-based' micro-analyst, or anecdote-telling African activist is not that well respected. Her work often gets relegated to the human-interest stories section. At international conferences, it is the conceptual papers that get discussed, rather than the practical experiences or suggestions. Any academic journal will show the power imbalances between Northern and African feminists. Rarely does one find an article written by anyone on the front line.

The most recent fashion is for co-authored articles by Northern and African 'writers', but one can still pick out who contributed what to the piece. Donors are equally reluctant to support work by African women that is not practical and grassroots-oriented. Donors hardly ever support feminist academics on the continent – in strategic thinking processes or macro-policy work (including advocacy); but they have no problem giving resources to an institute of development studies, or a women's studies centre at a Northern university. Clearly, the Northern colleagues are not asked in what way their work is going to impact directly on the lives of poor African women. Nor are they asked to involve the grassroots.

How are African feminists and activists expected to strengthen or develop our intellectual capacities when we are too busy running small projects, while others have all the space, the resources and the support they need?

The personal is no longer political

A more worrying offshoot of all this is that many African feminist activists find it difficult to live out the principle that the personal is political. By articulating issues that affect the other, the non-poor woman distances herself from even those struggles that should be hers. In the process she loses the ability to position herself within the solutions that she ultimately 'prescribes' for others. So, for example, on HIV/AIDS she will spread prevention messages that she herself has not even tried or, worse, knows do not work.

In the end she cannot really win, can she? On the one hand, she is seen as illegitimate if she does not dredge up the grassroots, and on the other she cannot get close enough to the same grassroots, because she does not identify with their reality. It would enrich development work were non-poor women accorded the right and the space to tell their own story and work on issues that concern them. There would even be resonance and solidarity with Northern women who also have made telling the stories of others into an art-form. Just like us, they suffer from violence, have the same concerns about HIV/AIDS and reproductive rights etc. – even if there is a difference in degree and other nuances. But the principal villain we are dealing with is the same: patriarchy and power relations. It would also enrich all women's lives were they to share stories, strategies and create solidarity platforms. But this can only happen if both sides come to this common space with honesty and without 'othering' the other.

Conclusion: creating new images and using new approaches

The development community's new fad is the rights-based approach. Perhaps this might offer a way for us to begin to move away finally from some of these stereotypes and myths about the African woman. The rights-based approach creates new opportunities for reconceptualizing our understandings of poverty, for example. As various authors have shown, poverty is not simply resource poverty but includes violence, denial of personhood, silencing, marginalization, denial of choice and other freedoms. All of these are experienced by the so-called 'poor and other women'.

Therefore, in rights-based approaches, resource poverty ceases to be 'the' central distinguishing factor. Rather, what matters is the denial and/or violation/s of rights, which is based on nothing other than sex and gender. This, however, is not to suggest that all women are the same and that all women regardless of class, race and other factors should be treated the same. Development agencies can still choose among the various categories of women whom they want to focus on and work with.

What I am suggesting is that there is a need for conceptual clarity and a strategic shift from conceptualizing poverty in very simplistic terms, and consequently choosing partners also based on such simplistic understandings of the complexity of African women's lives. This shift would also enable development practitioners and donors in particular to move away from the simplistic 'magic bullet' solutions that they often propose for African women, examples of which include income-generating activities and awareness-raising campaigns. Just looking at non-resource-poor women, who do not need income-generating activities, and yet suffer from domestic violence or are infected with HIV/AIDS, would answer the question: So, what else needs to change?

This strategic shift would see us moving beyond our favourite African woman, to strategic engagements with those other women who not only need support, but who can be strategic allies and leaders in development. But of course this means the power relations between Northerners and African women must also shift dramatically: from seeing us as objects of charity – which those of us who are not poor or powerless and not likely to get pregnant are not – to seeing us as agents of our own change; from seeing us as junior partners with the anecdotes, to seeing us as analysts and macro-level actors in our own right. And when we talk back and challenge, we would perhaps no longer be labelled 'so difficult to work with' or 'too sensitive'.

Rights-based approaches give those of us who are not resource-poor a space within development discourse and practice to participate fully in change processes. This would help to re-energize us, as we become more emotionally and spiritually invested and uplifted by the work we do. Because as long as we feel that 'development' is about 'others' far removed from our own realities, we will not see what we do as more than a job that we get paid for. Personal investment gives us the tools to live out the personal as political.

Most importantly, the strategic shift to rights-based approaches would mean that we develop the courage to tell the good African stories, and show the positive images of African women. This might even begin to suggest redundancy for the missionaries among us. And then, hopefully, we can support the poor, powerless and pregnant one to deliver her babies and take a well-deserved rest.

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11 | Mainstreaming gender or 'streaming' gender away: feminists marooned in the development business

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This chapter is about taking stock of experiences of mainstreaming gender. It addresses two related concerns. First, that after three decades of feminist activism in the field of development – both at the level of theory and practice – most development institutions have still to be constantly reminded of the need for gender analysis in their work, policy-makers have to be lobbied to 'include' the 'g' word and even our own colleagues need convincing that integrating a gender analysis makes a qualitative difference. Second, by constantly critiquing their own strategies, feminist advocates have changed their approaches, but institutional change continues to be elusive (except in a few corners).

Gender and development advocates cannot be faulted for their technical proficiency.[1] Making a case for gender and development, developing and implementing training programmes, frameworks, planning tools and even checklists, unpacking organizational development and change from a gender perspective, have all contributed to building technical capacity and pushed forward technical processes for the integration of gender equality concerns in development. The literature also acknowledges that gender equality is as much a political as a technical project and efforts have been directed towards creating 'voice' and influence, lobbying and advocacy.

So who are 'we'? I situate myself among those of us who started out in the development movement of the 1970s in a Third World country. I was shaped by the feminist movement in India, was groomed by the international gender and development movement in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, and am now in a Northern institution that undertakes research, training and technical assistance in development policy and practice. My job involves working with international organizations, national governments and national and international NGOs to integrate a gender perspective in policy and practice. In this chapter, I use my own experiences to interrogate how the concerns of feminists from similar locations with the political project of equality are being normalized in the development business as an ahistorical, apolitical, de-contextualized and technical project that leaves the prevailing and unequal power relations

intact. This normalization is happening at both the level of discourse and material practice.

Gender mainstreaming: the bold new strategy

Mainstreaming was the overall strategy adopted in Beijing to support the goal of gender equality. The political rationale for this strategy follows on from what feminist advocates had been struggling to establish – that rather than tinkering at the margins of development practice, gender should be brought into centre-stage (Razavi 1997).

Gender mainstreaming involves:

- the integration of gender equality concerns into the analyses and formulation of all policies, programmes and projects
- initiatives to enable women as well as men to formulate and express their views and participate in decision-making across all issues

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) guidelines state: 'A mainstreaming strategy does not preclude initiatives specifically directed toward women. Similarly, initiatives targeted directly to men are necessary and complementary as long as they promote gender equality' (OECD/DAC 1998: 15). In practice, there are two interrelated ways in which gender equality concerns can be mainstreamed.

The aim of 'integrationist mainstreaming' is to ensure that gender equality concerns are integrated in the analysis of the problems faced by the particular sector; that these inform the formulation of policy, programmes and projects; that specific targets are set for outcomes and that the monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes capture the progress made in the achievement of gender equality.

The aim of transformative or agenda-setting mainstreaming is to introduce women's concerns related to their position (strategic interests) into mainstream development agendas, so as to transform the agenda for change. For example, one of the ways of ensuring that gender equality concerns are integrated into agriculture is to make sure that extension services address both women and men and that technological packages are appropriate for both women's and men's roles in agriculture. However, the issue might be that women in their own right, and not as wives or dependants of men, have no rights over land. Advocacy for women's land rights is thus necessary to set the agenda for change of mainstream programmes addressing gender inequality in agriculture.

Integration and transformation require work at two different institutional levels. While integration involves working within development

institutions to improve the 'supply' side of the equation, a transformative agenda requires efforts to create constituencies that demand change. The latter requires an understanding of the nature of political society, state–society relationships, and the extent to which in particular contexts the policy-making institutions are dependent on, or autonomous from, the influence of international development and financial institutions. Integration depends for its success on transformation. In order to build the accountability of policy-making institutions to the gender-differentiated public they are supposed to serve, the creation of the demand for democratic, accountable and just governance has to go hand in hand.

Much of the work in integration has been concentrated on institutions and involved improving the technical processes in development. Gender advocates have had to make a case for integration of gender issues by showing how this would benefit the organization and meet official development priorities. To do this, they have developed frameworks, checklists and tools for gender integration in policies and programmes and trained people in gender awareness and planning, monitoring and evaluation. The challenge that feminist advocates in development have faced and continue to face is that their work straddles both worlds – the technical and political – but the development business tolerates only the technical role.

Why is this so? Both integrationist and transformative versions of mainstreaming require explicit acknowledgement of equality goals. These goals entail a redistribution of power, resources and opportunities in favour of the disadvantaged, which in the case of gender mainstreaming happens to be women. Many of the reasons why the development business barely tolerates any role for feminist advocates has to do with the understandings of the development process itself. The most influential and pervasive understanding of development is that it is a planned process of change in which techniques, expertise and resources are brought together to achieve higher rates of economic growth (Kabeer 1994).

From incorporation to rights

In recent years, concerns about the accountability of decision-making institutions to the public, respect for human rights and the need for enhanced voice and participation have tempered this economically defined development agenda. Even so, transformation – as signifying changes in relations of power and authority and growing equality between social groups – is hardly ever explicitly acknowledged as a goal, except where it is instrumental to the development imperatives of poverty eradication, improvement in children's health, family welfare, intra-household equity and fertility decline.

The international policy agenda throughout the 1960s, 1970s and much of the 1980s was less concerned with women's rights than with how to incorporate women into the development process (Molyneux and Craske 2002). It was not until the 1990s that the focus shifted to rights and led to the questioning of women's position in their own societies. This focus on rights was brought about by the burgeoning international women's movements struggling worldwide for the right to have rights and basic civil liberties. While the international conferences organized by the UN in the 1990s provided the spaces for organizing around rights and the forums in which to articulate demands, it was the growing strength of social movements, especially women's movements, which brought back issues of social justice, equality and rights into the development agenda.

Feminist scholars have argued that advocacy on behalf of women which builds on the common ground between feminist goals and official development priorities has made greater inroads into the mainstream development agenda than advocacy which argues for these goals on the grounds of their intrinsic value. The reason, they say, is because in a situation of limited resources, where policy-makers have to adjudicate between competing claims, advocacy for feminist goals in intrinsic terms takes policy-makers out of their familiar conceptual territory of welfare, poverty and efficiency, into the nebulous territory of power and social injustice (Razavi 1997; Kabeer 1999). Even though it has not automatically secured accountability to women's concerns, explaining the world to policy-makers has nevertheless driven the work of feminist advocates in development. It has led to the undermining of radical analytical and methodological tools, as when Molyneux's distinction between strategic and practical gender *interests* (1985) became translated in development planning language as *needs* rather than rights (Moser 1989).

However, there are other reasons why the development business can barely tolerate the technical role of gender and development advocates, while rejecting outright the political project of gender equality. These have to do with deep-seated resentment of and consequent resistance to the project of equality between men and women and the language of politics that assertions of equality bring forward.[2] The language of women's rights is deeply disturbing because it involves separating out the identity of women as citizen-subjects from their identities as daughters, wives and mothers, the subject of social relations. It is threatening not only for development institutions, but also for communities and families who stand to lose when male prerogatives to rights and resources are in jeopardy. Feminist scholarship has devoted much attention to unpacking the inherent male bias in development processes (Elson 1991) and more recently male bias in the construction of rights and law and interpretation and implementation of

law (Mukhopadhyay 1998; Goetz 2003). The cumulative impact of these resentments and resistance has been the silencing of the project of equality and its rendering into an ahistorical, apolitical, de-contextualized and technical project both at the level of discourse and material practice.

Gender mainstreaming means getting rid of the focus on women

While a mainstreaming strategy does not preclude initiatives specifically directed towards women, in the development business it has come to mean exactly the opposite. Initiatives specifically directed towards women are seen as a failure of mainstreaming. Experiences in a project in Yemen, financed by the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) in Sanaa, provide a good illustration of this. The objective of the project was to support the rural women's directorate in the Ministry of Agriculture to reach out to women farmers. Earlier the RNE, under the leadership of the sector specialist for women and development, supported the Ministry of Agriculture in Yemen in developing a gender policy that would pave the way for a better deal for the majority of invisible tillers of the land and tenders of household cattle – that is, the women and girl children of Yemen. The Ministry of Agriculture in Yemen has a section called the Rural Women's General Directorate (RWGD). In each of Yemen's provinces, teams are attached to the provincial agriculture extension offices, which generally consider only men to be farmers, to serve the interests of this silent majority. Our responsibility was to build the capacity of these units and to make sure that they served the interests of women farmers, who are responsible for a large part of the work that contributes directly to household food security. This project received strong support from the Minster of Agriculture, who strengthened the rural women's sections in the provinces, often upgrading them to directorates, so that they had more power within the bureaucracy.

Responsibility for this project at the RNE was shifted from the sector specialist for women and development to the officer in charge of agriculture and rural development, on the grounds that 'gender had to be mainstreamed'. The sector specialist for women and development was keen for this project not to be seen as a 'women's project', but as one that made a difference to the policies and practices of the agricultural sector and to the donor strategy. But she did not succeed in establishing this analysis. Negotiations between the Ministry of Agriculture and the RNE regarding future support for the sector continued to treat the rural women's general directorates as marginal. Finally, faced with budget cuts, the RNE axed the project on the grounds that 'gender had been mainstreamed' and thus there was no need to resource the special emphasis on women. This in a country where extreme gender segregation means that women farmers

cannot be approached by male extensionists, even if they wanted to, and where women workers of the ministry are seen as illegitimate occupants of public office because they are women and not men.

Whose responsibility?

At an international conference held in 2002 entitled 'Governing for Equity' and organized by my department in the Royal Tropical Institute, a panel of gender advocates from international organizations and donor bodies discussed the strategies and problems of their organizations in gender mainstreaming (Mukhopadhyay 2003a). The presentations highlighted the common experiences of international institutions in integrating a gender perspective. While there is recognition and acceptance within institutions of the importance of gender equality in development, the *practice* of incorporating a gender perspective in all programmes and policies is beset with difficulties that are not being overcome by present strategies. The main strategy has been to incorporate gender equality concerns in external policies, to demonstrate the importance of gender analysis as a tool for operationalizing the mandate of the institution, and in some instances the setting up of a gender infrastructure, such as gender focal points or departments. For the most part, however, the integration of gender equality in the work done by these institutions relies on committed gender expertise and the 'good will' of colleagues. Accountability to gender equality concerns throughout policy-making and programme implementation on a sustained basis is hard to pin down.

Gender mainstreaming has been adopted as a tool for gender integration in the UN system and by other multilateral institutions. This strategy raises two kinds of questions regarding accountability. First, gender mainstreaming as a tool does not actually convey to those using it what exactly it is that they are responsible for ensuring. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) representative at the conference, it would be preferable to focus on women's rights, children's rights and men's rights because the rights focus actually tells one what has to be achieved. Second, gender mainstreaming as a tool is supposed to ensure that everybody is answerable for gender equity commitments. This has generally meant that nobody is ultimately responsible for getting it done. The limited success of gender mainstreaming in international institutions is due both to the absence of professional and political accountability and the lack of institutional spaces for enforcing accountability. Who is going to hold UNICEF or the World Bank or for that matter DGIS (the Development Cooperation directorate of the Royal Netherlands government) responsible for not promoting gender equality? And how?

Gender mainstreaming = more women in organizations

While gender mainstreaming implies the integration of gender equality concerns into the analyses and formulation of all policies, programmes and projects, in organizational practice this has increasingly come to signify that gender equality goals can be achieved solely by increasing the number of women within organizations and in decision-making positions. This line is generally pushed by well-meaning donors.[3] Most gender mainstreaming checklists mention this as an item that has to be ticked off in order to determine whether or not a client government department or a non-governmental organization (NGO) has made progress on gender equality. For them, this is easier to measure than to what extent gender analysis has entered into the formulation of policies, programmes and projects. While it is important to push for equality of opportunity for both women and men within development organizations, this cannot be the be-all and end-all. If such measures are introduced in an ahistorical and de-contextualized manner, they can have serious consequences for gender politics within organizations.

This was evident in a workshop I conducted in Cambodia in April 2003, the theme of which was gender mainstreaming in human rights organizations (Mukhopadhyay 2003b and 2003c). During the workshop, the director of the largest human rights NGO in Cambodia explained that increasing the number of women in his organization was what he interpreted as constituting gender mainstreaming. He had adopted a policy whereby 30 per cent of the staff would, over a period of time, be female. He has faced and is facing stiff resistance from his board and especially from the one female member. She opposes the policy on the grounds that hiring women means lowering the standard of the workforce because women are generally less qualified. Asked what he had done faced with this resistance he replied that he was determined to make the policy work and had continued to hire and promote women. Representatives of the donors for this organization, who were also present at the workshop, saw his stand as vindication of their efforts to push gender equality in human rights NGOs. The director, a man, emerged as the champion of gender equality and the woman member of the board, not present, as the villain. Male leadership is legitimized by the underlying message: attempts at introducing equality policies are opposed by women themselves (read backward) and men are far more open to liberal ideas (read modern). Even more sinister, however, was the account of how this very same NGO had performed 'rather badly' a couple of years ago and that this coincided with the time that the gender policy was introduced. Members of the organization present at the workshop equated poor performance with the *introduction of the gender policy and less qualified women in the workforce.* Asked to give concrete instances of

how having more women in the organization had led to poor performance, they were unable to do so. Nevertheless, it had become 'common sense' understanding that the presence of more women leads to lowered standards of performance. The head of the Women's Department kept quiet in this discussion. The adoption of gender quotas and the attempts at promoting women had started a gender war in the organization. This then helped reinforce the dominant culture of misogyny.

Gender equality in the absence of an institutional mandate for promoting equality

To what extent is it possible to enforce gender equity commitments in institutions and within policy agendas whose main objective is not necessarily the promotion of equal rights and human rights? The main question is not how does one do it – feminists have been doing it all the time, creating a fit between gender issues and the organizational mandate/culture within which they operate (Razavi 1997). Rather we should ask whether it is possible in the long run to use instrumentalist arguments to persuade those not convinced of the intrinsic value of gender equality.[4] What really is the efficacy of internal advocacy without supportive politics?

In 2002, I was requested to undertake a situational analysis of gender mainstreaming efforts in selected ministries in Ethiopia. The report concluded that the Ministry of Education was doing far better than the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Health (Mukhopadhyay 2002). Each of these ministries has a Women's Affairs Department (WAD). The commitment of the Ethiopian government to address gender equality and equity concerns in development is formalized in the national policy on Ethiopian women issued by the Prime Minister's office in 1993. The policy draws attention to the main areas of concern, enlists strategies for implementation of the policy and sets up gender machinery within government. The national policy on women mandated the setting up of the WAD in the Prime Minister's office; women's affairs bureaux in the regions and the WADs in the ministries and commissions.[5]

Why was the Ministry of Education succeeding, while the Ministry of Agriculture was not? The difference in performance on the gender front seemed to be the main policy line promoted by the leadership and the *political support* that the WADs received from the leadership. The policy line developed by the Ministry of Education was based on a sustained analysis of the education sector in Ethiopia, which showed how achieving gender goals in education was essential to achieving overall goals. The WAD has been closely involved in the development of the new education and training policy which states clear support for girls' education, and a strategy

paper for improving girls' education was adopted by the ministry in early 1997 (Ministry of Education 1997). In July of the same year, the country embarked on an ambitious education sector development programme (ESDP) which sought to increase the gross enrolment rates and to reduce the gender gap in education, and which incorporated the strategies that had been developed for improving girls' education.

In contrast, the main policy direction in the Ministry of Agriculture seems to be to work towards rural economic transformation that will entail agricultural commercialization and the development of marketable agriculture. A three-point agenda has been devised: creating an enabling environment for capacity building of farmers; formulation of technological packages for commercial agriculture and increased productivity; and revising the rules and regulations to be able to intervene in the world market. Where do poor women farmers, or for that matter poor men farmers, fit in here? The WAD is left scratching at the margins of this policy because equity considerations are ruled out by these policy objectives. The main policy line does not address how the effects of increased commercialization on the gender division of labour and women's work burdens and welfare will be minimized and how the marginalization of women farmers will be avoided, or how household food security will be maintained.[6]

The main lesson that can be learnt from this contrast is as follows. While the overall policy direction of the Ministry of Education was to promote equality in access to education, there was political backing from the leadership to pay special attention to girls' education. Gender equality was an explicit goal of the leadership (interview, HE Genet Zewdie, Minister of Education, 2002).[7] The WAD within the ministry thus had considerable space for manoeuvre and enjoyed support from the political leadership for its advocacy and for suggestions as to how gender goals could be achieved. The political aim of the Ministry of Agriculture, on the other hand, was to build an agricultural sector that would be internationally competitive and profitable. The political space for the WAD to intervene in the policy objectives was thus limited, since there was no support from the top for the relevance of any gender equity objectives.[8] The gender guidelines produced by the WAD, based on data that showed the importance of women's roles in agriculture and food security and the gender gaps in extension and support services, remained a cosmetic document with little or no power of enforceability.

Conclusion: fighting back

These different examples illustrate how feminist concerns with the political project of equality are being normalized in the development business

as an ahistorical, apolitical, de-contextualized and technical project that leaves the prevailing and unequal power relations intact. Gender mainstreaming is being interpreted as getting rid of the focus on women, regardless of context. In Yemen, that context is of extreme gender segregation, which means that women farmers cannot be reached by male agriculture extension workers, while the interpretation of mainstreaming evades this and other questions of gender power relations. In other contexts, well-meaning donors and compliant organizations have reduced mainstreaming to a one-point programme of increasing the number of women within organizations, while the political project of equality between women and men is being undermined by gender conflict within organizations and by deeply demeaning images of women workers.

While most international organizations claim that there is recognition and acceptance within institutions of the importance of gender equality in development and there is a plethora of frameworks, tools and checklists available to aid these bureaucracies to integrate gender, there are no institutional mechanisms to check on failures. Gender mainstreaming in the absence of accountability becomes merely a technical exercise without political outcomes. As the Ethiopian example shows, integrating gender equality concerns within policy agendas whose main objective is not necessarily the promotion of equal rights is a near impossible task and one that reinforces the powerlessness of gender advocates and the gender equality agenda.

In repositioning gender in development policy and practice, we need to consider how to get back to the political project while not abandoning the present mode of engagement with development institutions. This was the goal of a three-year programme of work at the Gender Unit of the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam entitled Gender, Citizenship and Governance. It aimed to develop a range of good practices to bring about institutional change – changes in institutional rules and practices that would promote gender equality and enhance citizen participation, changes that build the accountability of public administration institutions to the gender-differentiated public they are supposed to serve. In order to build good practice on institutional change from a gender perspective, the approach adopted was to resource civil society institutions. Partnerships were developed with sixteen organizations in two regions: Southern Africa and South Asia. Each participating organization undertook action research projects on a theme of particular national and regional importance for gender equality. While these were on a range of issues, the initiatives undertaken can be categorized as follows: (1) enhancing and sustaining women's representation and political participation; (2) engendering governance institutions; (3) claiming citizenship and staking a claim to equal rights.

The activities, successes and failures of these action research projects suggest the following lessons (Mukhopadhyay and Meer 2004):

- The importance of establishing citizenship as an intrinsic component of development, where citizenship is understood as feminists have been defining and redefining it: to mean having entitlements, rights, responsibilities and agency. This includes the right to have a right, to politicize needs, and to have influence in producing wider equality in decision-making in development. A good example here is the release of women's agency in the efforts by Durbar (see Bandyopadhyay et al., this volume) to articulate the voice of sex workers by changing perceptions and by foregrounding their real experiences of exclusion from entitlements and rights that they face as women.
- The importance of carving out spaces for articulation and citizen participation. Just as rights have to be articulated, the space for articulation and citizen participation has to be constructed. In Pakistan, the government has set up the National Commission on Women without consultation with civil society groups. Women's groups feared that without a truly independent status, enforcing authority or clear mandate, the commission would be unable to make any significant contribution towards changing the situation of women. Two civil society women's organizations (Aurat Foundation and Shirkat Gah), made the strategic decision to initiate a post-facto consultative process involving all stakeholders, government, commission members, civil society and experts. This reinforced the idea that critical decisions of this nature should involve all stakeholders and that citizens have a right to participate. The consultations with civil society and women's rights organizations at the provincial level served to introduce the members to their constituency and to listen to their expectations. The national consultation brought together all parties – civil society organizations and commission members – in formulating the key recommendations for changes to the power, mandate and composition of the NCSW. Government measures to enlarge the future role and mandate of the NCSW are under way.[9]
- The importance of creating constituencies and 'communities of struggle'. Changes in institutional rules and practices to promote gender equality and enhance citizen participation require that women emerge as a constituency, are aware of their entitlements and are able to articulate these. Sakhi, a women's rights organization in Kerala, found that despite the existence of regulations favouring women's participation in

the decentralized planning process and appropriate budgetary allocations, women could not take advantage of these to further their strategic interests. They did not have the organization nor the articulation of interests needed to intervene. Sakhi set about remedying this situation by helping women to organize. It provided information and training so that women could undertake a needs analysis and training and support for the elected women representatives, building a constituency that could demand gender-fair practices.[10]

- The importance of establishing substantive equality as opposed to formal equality. The lived experience of specific categories of women (the most marginalized or those who are most affected by the specific lack of rights) must be honestly represented in constructing substantive citizenship as against citizenship as formal rights. The end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 opened up new political spaces for legal reform. One concern of the Rural Women's Movement (RWM) there has been that of customary marriage, which limited women's rights. They linked up with the Gender Research Project (GRP) at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) a university-based research unit, to research and advocate on this issue. When it became clear to CALS researchers that many rural women living in polygynous unions were concerned that outlawing polygyny would invalidate their unions and threaten their livelihoods, ways were found to intervene in the law reform process to address the key concerns of women living in polygynous marriages – their rights to property and custody of children.[11] By listening carefully to the worries and difficulties of particular rural women CALS brought the reform of customary law closer to their lived realities.

These emerging lessons suggest ways of getting back to feminist concerns with the political project of equality. The participating organizations have worked both within institutions to change norms and practices and outside institutions to build pressure on institutions to change, be more responsive and accountable to women's interests. They reconfirm that the political project of equality requires engagement in politics – the messy business of creating voice, articulating demand, carving out rights, insisting on participation and mobilizing women's constituencies to demand accountability.

Notes

1 The distinction between the technical, professional and scientific on the one hand, and the political on the other, is often made in development institutions. The technical often refers to the processes of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects.

It further refers to how to get things done in a specific timeframe and with set objectives. It relies on models, frameworks and tools for getting things done.

2 This resentment and resistance takes many forms, e.g. in 2003 there was a reorganization in the Royal Tropical Institute where I work. Our existence as a gender unit was called into question on the grounds that 'gender' was too narrow a field and we should be working on wider development issues. As a result we renamed our unit as Social Development and Gender Equity and have constantly to prove our 'social development' credentials.

3 Donor pressure on NGOs and governments to abide by certain conditions such as civil society participation and/or gender integration has led institutions to apply 'checklists' in a mechanistic way. Whitehead shows in her review of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in four countries that, in many cases, governments have conducted national dialogue on poverty policy not out of a genuine commitment to participation in policy-making, but simply to fulfil this condition of the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative and to access debt relief funds (Whitehead 2003).

4 Meer shows in her review of European Union (EU) and Department for International Development (DFID) gender policy in South Africa that while both have strong gender policies that link gender equality to poverty eradication, these policies are located within an overarching framework of market liberalization which promotes polices that increase the burden on poor women (Meer 2003).

5 See reports cited in this section: Ministry of Education (1999, 2001); the Women's Affairs Department of Ministry of Agriculture (1996, 2000); and the Women's Affairs Department of Ministry of Education (1995, 1999, 2000).

6 According to a study undertaken by the Department of Planning and Programming of the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and mentioned in the gender guidelines, 48.3 per cent of labour contributed in agriculture is female.

7 The Minister of Education, Genet Zewdie, also pointed out to me that while a lot had to be done (and is being done) to improve the supply side of education, maintaining the momentum required the empowerment of women to challenge the education system to provide better and relevant services.

8 Whitehead (2003) makes a related point in her review of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). She shows that poverty analysis in the PRSPs is limited. The description of impoverished groups does not extend to analysis of why they are poor, so gender relations cannot be advanced as an explanation of women's poverty.

9 Based on a case study prepared by the Aurat Foundation and Shirkat Gah Pakistan for the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) Gender Citizenship and Governance Programme and summarized in Mukhopadhyay (2003a).

10 Based on a case study prepared by Sakhi, India, for the KIT Gender Citizenship and Governance Programme and summarized in Mukhopadhyay (2003a).

11 Based on a case study prepared by Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) for the KIT Gender Citizenship and Governance Programme and summarized in Mukhopadhyay (2003a).

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12 | Critical connections: feminist studies in African contexts

AMINA MAMA

Feminism – an international political and intellectual movement to challenge the subordination of women – has many roots and trajectories. The theoretical and practical aspects of this movement draw connections between the local and the global manifestations of women's ongoing subordination, between the various movements that seek to advance liberation and development, and span the various academic disciplines that have to date structured much of what we define as social theory.

The impact of feminism on the global development industry has led to many things, only some of which are as radical and progressive as their instigators dreamed. The interaction between feminism and development has generated a series of approaches to development and a need for gender expertise, which has become something of a travelling circus of experts – gender technocrats touting a new kind of export product, whose brand-name has shifted with the decades, from WID to WAD to GAD to gender mainstreaming. These new women (and some gender-expert men) service the industry, but their value to the alleged beneficiaries of development remains debatable, as conditions of ordinary women and men in the former colonies of the West continue to worsen.

Developmental feminism can be understood as a product of the liaison between feminism and the development industry. It can be traced back to the initiation of the global development interest in women, and was early manifest in the UN Decade of the 1970s and 1980s.[1] If one were to take a long view, one might be tempted to draw an analysis that examines developmental feminism, tracing it back to precursors in feminist internationalism and the idea of global sisterhood. These were roundly challenged for their ethnocentrism when women from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean joined North American and European women on the international stages of the UN Decade for Women (1975–85). Nationally-based expressions of feminism took various forms, some radical, some liberal. Both state feminism and development feminism are organized round a liberal politics of entryism. Both display pragmatic tendencies that have taken on new importance in the era of neo-liberalism.

Whatever trajectory one traces, it is clear that developmental feminism has been the result of at times quite complex negotiations that reflect the rapid growth and proliferation of feminist thought and strategy on the one hand, and the long arm of much more powerful players in the development industry on the other. This unequal power and authority has ensured a dynamic of appropriation and incorporation that constantly subverts and depletes transformative feminist agendas. The only evidence I have for this assertion is the fact that, in real terms, women at the post-colonial periphery have seen their prospects deteriorate further with each new development era. A few years ago I noted that:

> The United Nations response to international feminism might have been a case of radical politics being incorporated and neutralised, but it nonetheless signalled the growing currency of feminist concerns within the global arena. ... [T]his created ... institutional needs for WID expertise, which in turn generated a bureaucratic discourse on women in development. The fact that this bureaucratic discourse developed largely within the practical exigencies of conducting rapid appraisals and developing politics and project proposals meant that it was often far removed from the liberatory concerns of the international women's movement. (Mama 1997: 417)

African feminist scholars have articulated stringent critiques of the manner in which anti-democratic African governments jumped on to the WID bandwagon in ways that in the end failed to advance more radical and liberatory feminist agendas. For example, it has been noted that although a number of governments across the region established national machineries for women, these were never properly resourced and thus remained largely ineffective. Others, like those in Ghana and Nigeria, set about pursuing grandiose projects run by the wives of dictatorial heads of state, and so served as mere foils, set up to confer legitimacy on otherwise discredited dictatorial regimes (TWN 2000; Mama 1995; 1998; Ibrahim 2005).

Today, now that the state has been rolled back, and in some instances collapsed entirely, one might want to speak less of bureaucratization and more of marketization. The poorly defined and even more poorly understood logic of 'market forces' has largely supplanted the hegemony, and some might say the protection, of the state. That this shift has been accompanied by financial stringencies that thwart and subvert social justice agendas whenever these do not 'add value' in the immediate term only makes it harder to live with. It produces a levelling down instead of a levelling up of the various public and educational services that a tax-paying public might reasonably expect not to have to pay for.

Within the world of global development, feminism has made com-

plicated inroads that are sometimes hard to decipher. This is because they are the product of complex negotiations within and across the hierarchies of power that imbue the complex of organizations currently dominating the development industry. Each apparent advance has generated its own challenges and risks; each manoeuvre has been greeted with new manoeuvres. As we enter the 'knowledge society', a key concern must be the global inequalities played out in the arena of knowledge production, in which I include feminist knowledge production. Feminist intellectual work has been dispersed, but much of it can still be found under the institutionally negotiated rubrics of gender and/or women's studies.

Women's studies, gender studies, feminist studies

Apart from the various structures, policies and projects that have resulted from WID, WAD and GAD approaches to development, feminism has also generated a large and diverse body of theoretical and conceptual tools, a corpus of methodologies and approaches to knowledge-building, an impressive array of pedagogical innovations and adaptations that are deployed by teachers, a substantial body of new knowledge, and an internationalization of women's studies.

Chandra Mohanty (2003: 518–23) describes three types of Western feminist interest in the non-Western world: the feminist-as-tourist/international consumer, the feminist-as-explorer who is more open-minded but no less voracious a consumer, and finally the feminist solidarity/comparative feminist studies type. All three are US-based, and, while we might recognize the 'types' and even encounter them all quite frequently, I am more concerned to address the epistemological and practical challenges that face feminist scholars living and working in the rest of the world. To do this, I will draw on the African contexts with which I am most familiar.

It is worth recalling that one of the major contributions of feminist epistemology, enriched as it has been by the interventions of Southern-based feminists, is an insistence on being constantly alert to the politics of location and diversities of class, race, culture, sexuality and so on. Feminist epistemology also seeks to build understanding of the connections between the local and global, between the micro-politics of subjectivity and everyday life, and the macro-politics of global political economy. This reflects a commitment to a certain holism, to challenging and subverting the disciplinary and locational fragmentations which have tended to demarcate and circumscribe the theorizing of gender and gender relations. Feminist intellectuals, therefore, straddle many intellectual and institutional arenas, in which they face the challenge of keeping global and local levels of analysis in their sights. They thus need to cultivate the navigational skills required

to move between the different and at times competing levels of analysis, and to network effectively.

In the academic arena, whether one refers to women's studies, gender studies or the more assertive idea of feminist studies, it is clear that feminist intellectual work has generated a great deal of ferment across all the conventional disciplinary landscapes. Whether one is considering psychology or political economy, biology or fine art, the influence and effects of feminist ideas have been a key feature of twentieth-century thought, one which is continuing to exercise the intellectual and political life of the twenty-first century. Feminist studies have often been deeply subversive, overturning pre-existing assumptions, pre-existing histories of knowledge, and transforming pre-existing accounts of human history with rich and interesting herstories that function to complete and to subvert the masculine-dominated canons that went before.

However, the myth that feminism has generated only good and radical things needs to be constantly debunked. There are nowadays many less-than-radical gender interventions, in which gender is applied as a depoliticized, technical device, generating log frames and statistics, but doing little to challenge unjust gender relations. This is gender analysis denuded so that it ceases to challenge the patriarchal power of the development industry, and instead 'adds value' to existing meta-narratives. It is my intention to explore some of the ways in which the changes in development brought about by local and global feminist interventions have played out in African contexts, with particular reference to the potential of gender and women's studies units as sites for feminist activism. I will discuss some of the strategic implications that arise from this exploration, and end by outlining some of the ways in which African scholars working in gender and women's studies are responding to present challenges.[2]

African contexts We are all aware that Africa has for centuries been afforded a special place in Western mythology, a dark and antithetical land of fables and fantasies, imbued with sexuality, violence and taboo. The advent of modern science did little to interrupt this fabulous status, but rather continued to construct the mother continent as a series of myths that grew more gothic with every generation, and which gained currency as underdevelopment gained ground. However, the emergence of modern feminism in African contexts can be traced back to the liberal philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, perhaps earlier, as early manuscripts from Egypt and Southern Africa demonstrate. As independence struggles gained ground, feminist activists emerged in a number of countries; those in Egypt and Nigeria being among the best

known. They combined political actions with intellectual work and their writings formed an important aspect of their activism. So it was that the Egyptian Feminist Union established by Huda Sharawi in the 1920s produced a journal, and acknowledged the influence of earlier poets and writers such as Doria Shafik. So it was too that Mrs Ransome-Kuti and Mrs Ekpo, both well-known Nigerian activists, were educators and writers, as well as militant political actors.

Throughout the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the connections between feminist activism and feminist scholarship in African contexts have only been partly compromised by the development of Western-style educational institutions that have tended to aspire towards the Western-style separation between thought and action. They have also been complicated by the dominance of developmentalism, something that does not feature so much in Western histories of feminism. In practical terms, however, the uptake of feminism within development has provided women's movements with resources for women's projects, and, although limited in the grand scheme of things, they have supported a plethora of organizations, networks and movements, most of which are yet to be documented with any seriousness.

What can continental feminist scholarship in the field of gender and women's studies contribute to the development and transformation of African societies? To what extent does the work of feminists counter the generalizations of the global development industry and its appropriation of gender? To what extent are feminist perspectives heard in the development industry, in the global academic arenas, or even within Africa's policy-making and intellectual communities? In what follows I review the field, critically examining what it has to offer in the context of, or despite, the sustained external domination of continental intellectual life. I argue that feminist studies represents a critical and independent field of work, one that maintains connections between theory and practice, and across institutions and fields, and which offers valuable critical perspectives furnished by the particular vantage points afforded to the women of Africa.

Mapping the terrain[3] Gender and women's studies (GWS) has been a growth area within the African higher education sector over the last two decades. From just a handful of sites in the early 1990s, the field has grown to include thirty or more sites, scattered across Africa's 600-plus higher education institutions. The oldest of these are those at the Women's Documentation Centre in the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ibadan and the Women's Documentation Centre at the University of Dar Es Salaam, while the largest is the Department of Women and Gender

Studies at Makerere University. The greatest concentrations are found in the countries with the most universities, notably Nigeria, with half a dozen centres in forty universities, and South Africa.[4]

The number of faculty and students has increased substantially, too, and there are signs that gender studies is indeed gaining institutional ground, as the number of sites recognized as full academic departments has also risen during the last few years. Of the thirty who responded to the AGI's survey, seventeen have dedicated units with specialized staff, while thirteen more run courses and modules that form part of mainstream degrees. However, of the dedicated units, only four have full departmental status: the University of Makerere's Department of Women and Gender Studies, the University of Buea's Department of Women's Studies, the University of Cape Town's African Gender Institute (AGI) and the University of Zambia's Gender Studies Department (2001 figures).

The intellectual content of the teaching varies, but even a cursory survey indicates that the vast majority of these teach in the area of development. Very few teach, or admit to teaching, in more controversial fields, such as sexuality, and those that do place it under the respectable rubric of health or population studies, rather than treating it as a key aspect of gender, or even gender and development. This suggests a degree of pragmatism, and a willingness to comply with administrative rationales that bind gender studies to developmentalism, and to accommodate feminist initiatives in so far as they present a funding opportunity.

Those engaged in teaching point to a number of substantial constraints. Beyond the salient problems of overload and poor remuneration, a major challenge to the development of locally relevant teaching, which can support and or develop activist agendas with local women's movements, is posed by the limited availability of locally generated research and publications, and the constrained access to those studies that do exist.[5]

Most of the teaching appears to be taking place at graduate level, with only a few sites offering undergraduate degrees, and only two (the AGI and Makerere Department of Women and Gender Studies) offering support all the way through to doctoral level. The limitations on graduate offerings are most evident at doctoral level, something which reflects the dearth of senior level capacity, as there are hardly any full professors with specialized skills in gender studies. This in turn reflects the overall deficit in senior women academics, such that only 3 per cent of Africa's professors are women, and we make up as few as 12 per cent of faculty (Ajayi et al 1996; Mama 2004). Women have a tough time within mainstream departments, but the existing GWS programmes and departments also present their own challenges, especially for women pursuing academic and

research careers and hoping for an upward trajectory within the academic establishment.

The wider reform effort at the largest department, at Makerere University, has created a situation in which there are now over 1,000 students enrolled at the Department of Women's Studies. The expanded teaching load has been accompanied by competing demands coming from stakeholders within and outside the university. From within the university have come demands related to gender mainstreaming policy, as women's studies are expected to include responsibility for ensuring that various institutional players and academics are kept aware of the cross-cutting importance of gender. From outside the university come additional demands from government and from international donors seeking quick-fix consultants, or requesting staff training. The department has tried to respond to these needs by negotiating partnership arrangements with Northern institutions. These enabled the department to establish an outreach programme in gender training, which set out to achieve the commendable goal of creating 'a critical mass of development workers who would work directly with communities to enhance their capacities to meet women's practical needs and to advocate for change where required'.

However, despite its popularity with the constituencies for whom it was designed, the gender training programme could not be sustained once donor funding was discontinued.[6]

The situation at the AGI – established in 1996, five years after Makerere's Women and Gender Studies Department – bears some similarities, in terms of being subject to competing demands from multiple stakeholders. While the AGI has been formally recognized as an academic department since 1998, it has not been staffed or supported by the University of Cape Town, so its teaching programme has remained much smaller, and only partially able to respond to student demand for places, especially at graduate level. It has also not been able to sustain externally funded research and writing workshops for the various governmental and non-governmental constituencies seeking them. The AGI has had to develop linkages with donors, and it has used these to carry out intellectual development work, the best known aspects of which are the continental feminist studies network, the curriculum development initiative, and a number of research and publishing activities. It has utilized donor resources to develop a broad continental initiative, rather than to sustain the core academic programmes that it provides to the university.

Establishing a new and cross-disciplinary gender studies programme has been an uphill struggle in the context of the complexities of the higher education reform process, and the contradictions between political rhetoric

and institutional realities. While the mission of University of Cape Town depicts the university as an African institution, there is little consensus over what this means, and hardly any engagement with what this might require. In terms of institutional policy, concerns over gender are played off against concerns over racial equity, the latter being given more airtime than the former, presumably because 'race' is perceived to offer better political capital than gender in the post-apartheid context.

The AGI has foregrounded its own dual agenda of delivering intellectually rigorous teaching and research in gender studies grounded in the particular challenges posed by various African contexts. To sustain its own work both intellectually and financially, the AGI has been compelled to rely substantively on external funding, in so far as this confers a greater degree of academic freedom than the strictures of a cash-strapped faculty based on conservative discipline-based academic departments. In this way the institute maintains a small, but continentally networked, critical space from within which it can better service and support the long-term agenda of producing socially conscious intellectuals skilled in feminist analysis, theory-building, research and pedagogical skills. Such people, however they are named, are envisaged as having a critical role to play in the social and political transformation of Africa. What this has meant in practice is a focus on teaching and research as political praxis, and a commitment to working within African institutions of higher education. This has been pursued by sustaining a taught academic programme while simultaneously developing a continental intellectual development programme aptly referred to as the Strengthening Gender Studies for Africa's Transformation project.

Conclusions

The transdiscplinary field of gender studies has emerged through the nexus between feminism and development, and this has been responsible for as many constraints as opportunities, as can be seen from the myths and fables currently circulating under the variously named rubrics of women in development, women and development, gender in development, gender and development, and gender mainstreaming. While many of these terms suggest broadly emancipatory agendas, using the term feminist to denote the more radical conceptualizations would confer greater clarity on this increasingly complex and contested field. Feminist approaches to development are, after all, modes of feminist activism and intervention. These seek to resist the mystifications and appropriations that have complicated the terrain.

Feminist approaches to development rely on and include an intellectual aspect. This has been discussed here under the broader rubric of GWS.

Here, too, the more radical and transformative teaching and research are informed by feminist pedagogies, epistemologies, theories, and as such could simply be referred to as feminist studies.

Feminist theories and intellectual capacities provide the critical analysis that is required to think and act beyond the myths and fables currently obscuring and curtailing the transformative potential of potentially radical gender work being orchestrated by feminist movements and carried into the international development arena. Such a conceptual clarification will enable us to move towards liberatory rather than liberal feminist development praxis. GWS in Africa straddles and links different institutional arenas and academic disciplines, representing a key site for locally grounded knowledge production. The knowledge generated by feminist analysis in African contexts is distinctive and original, being rooted in the locally diverse lived realities and experiences of the effects of global development policies. This is significant because hegemonic political and economic dogmas still emanate largely from international financial institutions and development agencies that are very far removed from the lives and struggles of women in Africa, even though they continuously invoke them (poor, rural, African women) to justify their operations. Feminist research carried out by gender-conscious and intellectually capacitated women in Africa, or indeed in any other location peripheral to the still-patriarchal centres of global power today, has the potential to generate new possibilities and insights regarding the connections between the local and the global dynamics of development/underdevelopment. These connections have become all the more salient as globalization has advanced, and an understanding of how they function is a necessary resource for those seeking to intervene and resist the growing inequalities and disparities in evidence in the current emphasis on economic reforms that jeopardize the hard-won gains women made at the end of the twentieth century (UNRISD 2005).

As a mode of activism, feminist scholarship also offers to restore the political, to counteract the depoliticizing influence of narrower approaches to development, dominated as these are by economic reductionism and technicism. Indeed, thinking beyond the myths and fables requires this clarity of perspective. It means that those engaged in teaching and research need also to be cautious with regard to their sources of support. GWS units are often called upon to provide 'gender experts' to perform consultancy and advisory services and to carry out the institutional work of implementing reforms – sometimes under the rubric of gender mainstreaming – both within and beyond universities. There is always the danger that providing such services, while it confers legitimacy on the field and may raise income, may undermine the intellectual autonomy and blunt the critical edge of

feminist scholarship. Alternatively, because these instrumental demands draw on the same pool of scholars as harder-to-come-by opportunities for independent research, they may serve to drain the capacity for feminist intellectualism.

The better known GWS centres these days find themselves inundated with invitations to participate in collaborative relationships with Western gender studies departments seeking to establish links as a means of ensuring their own survival by demonstrating that they have become global, in the context of their own cash-crunch. Such assistance, while it may be presented as a gesture of solidarity, is often a condition of funding/collaboration, whether or not the expertise is actually needed by the African partners. The terms of such collaborations need to be carefully considered and negotiated in full awareness of the history of unequal relations, and the aforementioned persistence of global imbalances in publication and research outputs within GWS.

It is to be hoped that feminism's history of generating new theoretical and practical tools, research methodologies and pedagogies, will enable feminist studies to survive beyond the instrumentalizing effects of these many demands, to continue to produce the critical capacity and the personnel that will ensure the creativity and commitment of feminist scholarship and development activism. Keeping open this critical space is necessary if we are indeed to continue to engage with, and where necessary resist, globally hegemonic development doctrines, and to continue to challenge the international development industry's inherent tendency to conserve and reinscribe patriarchal power.

Notes

An earlier draft of this paper was presented under a different title at 'Gender Myths and Feminist Fables' conference, University of Sussex, 2–4 July 2003.

1 For an elaboration of UN feminism see Mama (1997: 416–17).

2 This section draws on the African Gender Institute's current programme to strengthen gender and women's studies in African contexts.

3 This section draws on the work of the GWS Africa project team based at the African Gender Institute.

4 Details with map available at <www.gwsafrica.org>.

5 See AGI (2002) 'Strengthening Gender and Women's Studies in African Contexts', workshop report available at <www.gwsafrica.org>.

6 This experience with donor funding has been repeated at many other sites, including a number of continentally based NGOs purposely dedicated to providing gender training.

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13 | SWApping gender: from cross-cutting obscurity to sectoral security?

ANNE-MARIE GOETZ AND JOANNE SANDLER

Stephen Lewis, the United Nations special envoy to Africa on AIDS and an increasingly vocal and frankly agonized campaigner for women's rights, recently made his strongest condemnation yet of the way in which gender has been 'mainstreamed' in the UN system. In a speech to a conference on UN reform and human rights at Harvard Law School on Saturday 26 February 2006, he detailed the many ways in which the UN had failed women, and argued that women 'need a new and powerful voice. They need an advocate that never allows the world to forget the sorrow it perpetuates. They need a women's agency.' He dismissed gender mainstreaming as a 'pathetic illusion of transformation', leading to nothing but a 'cul de sac for women'. In an earlier statement he described the situation at the UN, in spite of the existence of several agencies whose work affects women, as resulting in a fragmentation and dispersal of efforts by a handful of under-funded and maligned agencies: 'Nobody is responsible,' he said. 'There is no money, there is no urgency, there is no energy.'[1]

Lewis's insistence that there should be a large and powerful women's UN agency, with, as he says, a budget of at least a billion dollars a year in order to compete with the wealth and clout of other UN agencies, begs the question of why there is not one already. And not just within the United Nations. There are large human rights organizations, such as Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, but why is there no equivalent specifically focused on women? There are large international non-governmental development agencies, like Oxfam International or CARE, but why are there no equivalents specifically focused on women? In countries worldwide, there are ministries that are supposed to include women as key constituencies – like Ministries of Health – that have budgets of hundreds of millions or billions of dollars, but why are there no ministries of women's affairs with such generous budgets? There are certainly UN organizations, international non-governmental and human rights organizations, and ministries that speak out on behalf of women; but mainstreaming has meant that integration has been sought, rather than the establishment of entities that advocate specifically for women with the resources and position to have maximum influence, outreach and representation in countries worldwide. What price have we paid for this?

14 | The NGO-ization of Arab women's movements[1]

ISLAH JAD

One of the dominant trends in the evolution of the Arab women's movements is a steady increase in the number of women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with aspects of women's lives such as health, education, legal literacy, income generation and rights advocacy. This can be seen as a sign of the failure of centralized Arab states to bring about social change and development. The expansion of NGOs is widely viewed as constituting the development of an Arab 'civil society' that can contain the authoritarian state and as a healthy sign of real, 'bottom-up' democracy in the region; it may also be viewed as a new and growing form of dependency on the West. Debates abound concerning the ideology of NGOs, their links both to their own states and to the states that fund them, and their utility for development and social change. These debates have been given a new edge by current American government attention to 'democratization' and 'modernization' of Arab societies and Arab regimes and its increased funding for civil society organizations. The US administration sees the role of women as vital in this respect.

This article traces the development of the Arab women's movements, paying special attention to what I call their 'NGO-ization'. I use this term to denote the process through which issues of collective concern are transformed into projects in isolation from the general context in which they are applied and without taking due consideration of the economic, social and political factors affecting them. NGO-ization has a cultural dimension, spreading values that favour dependency, lack of self-reliance and new modes of consumption. In advertisements in Palestinian newspapers, for example, it is common to read about collective community actions organized by groups of youth, such as cleaning the streets, planting trees, painting on the walls, followed by a little icon indicating the name of the donors who funded these 'projects'. It is also noticeable that many of the NGO events are held in expensive hotels, serving fancy food, distributing glossy material and hiring 'presentable' local youth. All this is leading to the gradual disappearance of the 'old' image of the casual activist with the peasant accent and look.

NGO-ization can also introduce changes in the composition of the

women's movement elites (Goetz 1997), which results in a shift in power relations. Radtke and Stam define power as the 'capacity to have an impact or produce an effect' so that 'power is both the source of oppression in its abuse and the source of emancipation in its use' (1994: 8). Like Rowlands (1998), they differentiate between two types of power: 'power over' as controlling power, which may be responded to with compliance or resistance, and 'power to' as generative or productive power, which creates new possibilities and actions without domination. This power can be what enables the individual to hold to a position or activity in the face of overwhelming opposition, or to take a serious risk.

Professionalism, and what I term 'project logic', can provide a new power base for NGO elites which determine which women's issues should be brought to public attention. They can also allow a shift from 'power to' women in the grassroots to 'power over' them by the new elite. Driven by project logic, NGO professionals often lack awareness of the forces active in civil society and the public sphere and their objectives, and risk weakening calls for more equitable gender relations and empowering more conservative actors in civil society. To shed some light on this trend among Arab NGOs, I examine the changing structures and discourses of Arab women's movements, in the context of a development discourse based in binaries such as West/East and state/civil society. The growing number of Arab NGOs in general, and women's NGOs in particular, must be seen in the context of a broader development trend that views NGOs as a vital vehicle for social change and democratization. I will argue that the NGO as a form of organization is different in critical ways from another kind of organization aimed at social change, namely the social movement. Analysing this difference is useful in revealing the limitations of NGOs in introducing genuine, comprehensive and sustainable development, and the social changes desired by local populations. In doing so, I argue that NGOs should be subjected to historical and empirical analysis so that equating them with 'healthy' socio-political development is problematized and not assumed.

Arab women's organizations in historical context

Many discussions about the proliferation and efficacy of Arab women's NGOs are contextualized in the dichotomy of West versus East. The West is seen by fundamentalist groups as a power which wants to impose its cultural values – especially individual freedom, materialism and secularism – on the world. Arab nationalists and leftists view the West as colonial and corrupting, buying the loyalties of the local elites, and bringing to the foreground what Leila Ahmed calls 'colonial feminism' (Ahmed 1992: 163).

Others set the proliferation of NGOs in a context of ongoing expansion of neo-liberalism, and the formation of a 'globalized elite' (Hanafi and Tabar 2002: 32–6; see also Hann and Dunn 1996; Petras 1997), or as 'mitigating the class conflict, diluting class identities and culture, blurring the class borders and blunting the class struggle within nations and between them' (Qassoum 2002: 44–56).

With the region experiencing increasing Western economic and political intrusion, Arab women's movements emerged in the first half of the twentieth century amid two major political projects, independence and modernization, stemming from secular nationalism and Islamic modernism respectively. While Islamic modernism aimed to rescue religion from narrow or erroneous interpretations, opening up Islam as a vital force in women's and men's daily lives, secular nationalism, articulated in the wake of colonial occupation, involved collective self-review as part of a project of national reinvigoration to win independence (Badran 1995; Baron 1994; Radwan 1998; Lazreg 1994).

Women were seen by the secular nationalists as an integral part of the 'new nation'; and women themselves saw the realization of their social rights as linked to future independent Arab states. In this context, Arab women formed organizations to enhance women's participation in the battles for independence, to defend their people and work to 'advance' women in the realms of education, political participation and cultural life. Their organizations and unions were strongly supported by the emerging national and religious elite striving for independence and the advancement of their countries. The heroic role played by Algerian and Palestinian women in the battles to liberate their countries was one outcome of this phase in the growth of women's organizations.

Arab women's movements at that time were not isolated from the emerging international women's movements. Egyptian women, for example, were closely involved in the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, and the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) produced a journal in French, *L'Egyptienne*, aimed in part at altering the national image of Egypt abroad. Egyptian feminists also called in the international feminist forum for attention to the violation of the national rights of Palestinian Arabs, as well as convening an early international conference in 1938 to support Palestinian women in their struggle against Zionism. This conference, 'Women of the Orient', attracted delegations from all over the Arab world and abroad, as well as a large Palestinian women's delegation (Zu'aytir 1980). International feminists were confronted with issues of imperialism that they may have preferred to ignore (Badran 1995).

In Egypt, Algeria, Palestine and many other Arab countries, the 'new

woman' was deployed, and deployed herself, against the colonizer. 'Authentic' dress and veiling did not constitute worrying issues at this time, and were not adopted by nationalist women as pressing strategies (Ahmed 1992; Badran 1995; Fleischmann 1999). Influenced by Arab socialism, many newly independent nations – Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Syria and Yemen – installed 'state feminism', introducing economic and social policies aimed at integrating women in the labour market and the new nation (Kandiyoti 1991; Molyneux 1991; Moghadam 1993; El-Kholy 1998). Many women, especially those from poorer social strata, benefited from social rights such as free education, health and maternity services.

In contrast to the situation before independence, however, the newly emerging states showed strong hostility towards independent women's organizations, especially during the 1960s, which led to their banning (Egypt, Jordan), or their cooptation (Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia). The legacy of 'populist authoritarianism' as an elite strategy for maintaining hegemony (Brumberg 1995: 230) endured despite the broad-based nature of independence struggles.

Arab women's experiences with their states vary from one nation to another. In most of the Gulf area, women's movements are still struggling to obtain basic political rights. In the states that claimed to be nationalist, socialist or progressive, women suffered from the 'Algerian syndrome': disappointment with state policies which did little or nothing to change women's status as 'dependants' on male citizens. The state in most of these countries did little to change laws and penal codes that did not reflect changes in the situation and status of women, especially well-educated, professional women from the middle and lower middle classes. New restrictions on women's organizations were imposed, and women who participated in opposition political parties were 'equally' targeted by state persecution and punishment. This led to the destruction or weakening of all forms of political and social participation, including political parties, workers', peasants', students' and women's unions. Some feminist voices arose in this period to denounce 'Arab patriarchy' as the main obstacle to women's advancement.

From the mid-1970s, with most Arab states failing to achieve a sustainable level of development, or to absorb the increasing number of young people seeking employment, structural adjustment policies were widely adopted. This resulted in the almost complete withdrawal of the state from investment in the public sector, which led in turn to a severe deterioration of social and economic rights, manifest in rising rates of unemployment and declining social welfare support from the state. In the longer term, this deterioration had a strong impact on women's status, illustrated by the

UNDP's *Arab Human Development Report 2002*, which showed increases in women's illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and political marginalization.

By the 1980s, when many Arab states were shaken by economic and social crises, most leaders successfully continued to evade domestic challenges, making only minimal response to demands for economic and political change. The collapse of the 'communist bloc', a traditional ally of many Arab states, contributed further to the retreat of progressive nationalism, at the same time as the Iranian revolution put an end to the regime of the Shah, bringing an Islamist religious leadership to power. Development within the region has also been held back by the increasingly aggressive policy of the state of Israel and the devastating destruction it has inflicted on countries like Lebanon and Palestine, and the consequent effects on ethnic separatist groups whether in Iraq, Sudan, Lebanon or elsewhere (Jawad 2003). Against an increasingly bleak background of internal stagnation, external pressure increased on Arab countries to introduce more change, this time under the banner of a new development policy, 'good governance', supported by the World Bank, the IMF, the USA and many European donors.

This external pressure has ratcheted up in the wake of September 11, with the increasingly aggressive policy of the USA and its demonization of Muslims in general and Arabs in particular. This has had negative effects of putting the whole region on the defensive and forcing its peoples to adhere even more to a decaying status quo. The discourse of 'good governance' has became particularly important in underpinning US interventions in the region, with the military aggression to force regime change in Iraq being justified by a rhetoric of the need to 'democratize'. The current US administration views the many ills in Arab society, including the inferior status of Arab women, as due to lack of democracy. US officials have said that their focus on democracy-building projects and the redirection of aid money to grassroots efforts can accomplish two things. One is to build the desire and ability to reform authoritarian governments, great and small. The other is to soften the image of the USA as a malign power whose only concern in the region is defending Israel on the Arab street and thus preserving its access to cheap oil. After infrastructure and free trade, 'democracy' tops the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) regional agenda (*Washington Post*, 4 November 2002). The promotion of democracy and the rule of law includes activities intended to strengthen 'civil society' and significant support to NGOs.

The USA's professed concern with democracy arouses the scepticism of many in the Arab world. Mustapha Kamel Al Sayyid, director of the Center for Developing Countries Studies at Cairo University, argues it would not be

in US interests to promote true democracy in Egypt, since the only viable alternative to the present government is the Islamist opposition – a group known for its dislike of American policy. 'If the result of democratization is that Islamists gain more voice in politics, then no doubt the US government will not, in practice, do much in the way of the real promotion of democracy' (cited in Lussier 2002). Important for women activists is that support for women's organizations by international actors, particularly the US government, and more generally for building up 'civil society', serves to add yet more fuel to an already burning debate in the Arab world on the role envisioned and played by Arab NGOs, and women's NGOs in particular, in the process of development, democratization and social change.

Development and feminism: echoes of the colonial encounter

These debates have to be examined with care and it must be taken into consideration that external aid, whether from UN agencies or foreign governments, is seen in many Third World countries as a small portion of what was historically stolen from them in the colonial encounter. The problem therefore is not in the aid itself, but rather in the way it is offered and invested and how it can be brought under more democratic control.

Some Arab feminists suggest that 'what the colonists sought was to undermine the local culture' through 'colonial feminism' (Ahmed 1992). Like Lazreg, Ahmed is disturbed by the resemblance she perceives between colonial discourses and that of some contemporary Western feminists. She perceives them as devaluing local cultures and assuming that there is only one path to the emancipation of women, namely the path of 'adopting Western models' (Ahmed 1992; Lazreg 1994). Badran (1995) rejects such a position, arguing that 'attempts to discredit or to legitimise feminism on cultural grounds ... are political projects'. For her, the origins of feminism cannot be found in any culturally 'pure' location: 'External elements – external to class, region, country – are appropriated and woven into the fabric of the "indigenous" or local. Egypt, for example, has historically appropriated and absorbed "alien elements" into a highly vital indigenous culture' (Badran 1995: 31–2). She implies that Egyptian feminism is part of such an indigenous culture, underlining how women such as Hoda Sharawi and Ceza Nabarawi were more nationalist and uncompromising regarding British colonialism than men of their class. In spite of meeting with European feminists, and developing their ideas in relationship to European feminist organizations, Egyptian feminists were politically independent, expressing criticism of European support for Zionism. Further, their deepest concern was with the conditions of Egyptian and Arab women. Thus Egyptian feminists were very much part of, and concerned

with, their own societies, and cannot be dismissed as Western (hence somehow inauthentic) agents.

It is important to study the contexts in which women's groups and organizations are working empirically. Their strategies, their form of organizations, their links to other social and political groups, to the state, and to powerful external agencies and their models of development cannot be analysed in a framework of the cultural dichotomies of East and West, especially, as Abu-Lughod has noted, because 'notions of separate cultures have themselves been produced by the colonial encounter':

> This leads to different possibilities for analysing the politics of East and West in the debates about women, ones that do not take the form of narratives of cultural domination versus resistance, cultural loyalty versus betrayal, or cultural loss versus preservation. It also opens up the possibility of exploring, in all their specificities, the actual cultural dynamics of the colonial encounter and its aftermath. (Abu-Lughod 1998: 16)

The rapid proliferation in the Arab world of issue-oriented groups, which is one way of defining an NGO, obliges us to ask how the struggle for these issues (mostly related to social rights) is linked to a wider political, social and economic context. This is particularly important with respect to women's issues so as to identify what other social groups might join the struggle for change on any specific issue. What we are seeing so far is that most Arab women's NGOs do not attempt a thorough analysis of, for example, the role of the state in allowing specific issues to persist; nor do they ask about its project for social change, or what the role of a wider women's and social constituency should be to achieve this change.

The Latin American experience supports the necessity for such analysis. Latin American women's movements have demonstrated that women's rights cannot be realized by pleading with an authoritarian state, nor by isolating women in women's organizations. By having their own organizations, then enlarging their constituencies, allying with political parties, and participating in the struggle for democratization and political transition, Latin American women managed to mainstream their demands within state and society (Alvarez 1990; Molyneux 1996; Waylen 1996). These scholars have shown that women's organizations did not follow one path or strategy in their conflict with the state, but rather a multifaceted approach that included many options.

An important point stressed by Waylen is that, in order to form political power, women's organizations need to link poor women's needs and interests with middle-class women's interests. The concept of citizenship implies some commitment to the principle of equality, and to universal

principles, but without assuming an undifferentiated public with identical needs and interests (Molyneux 1998). These challenges of reconciling different class interests face Arab women's movements. The way that these challenges are met will depend partly on organizational structure. It is here that a differentiated and nuanced approach to the concept of 'civil society' becomes necessary.

The NGO-ization of Arab women's movements

The formation of women's NGOs with particular social aims marks a very different form and structure for Arab women's activism than in earlier periods. The early years of the twentieth century were characterized by the spread of women's literary salons, mainly for highly cultured and educated upper-middle-class women. Urban middle- and upper-class women also ran charitable societies and later women's political unions, based on open membership for women. In Palestine, for example, charitable societies recruited hundreds of women in their administrative bodies and general assemblies, while women's unions had large memberships extending to women in villages, and after 1948 in refugee camps. Contemporary NGOs reach far fewer women.

The prevailing structure of today's NGOs is that of a board of between seven and twenty members and a highly qualified professional and administrative staff whose number is generally small, depending on the number and character of projects being dealt with. The power of decisions is often not, as it is supposed to be, in the hands of the board, but usually in those of the director, who sometimes has the power to change board members, without their knowledge. The power of the director stems from his or her ability to fund-raise, be convincing, presentable and able to deliver the well-written reports that donors require: communication and English-language skills become essential. The highly professional qualities required of administrative staff for better communications with donors may not directly affect the links between an NGO and local constituencies, but most of the time they do.

In the Palestinian experience, the qualities of cadres in the 'grassroots organizations' – the women's committees that were branches of political formations that sustained the first Palestinian Intifada – differed considerably from those required in NGO staff. The success of the cadres lay in *organizing* and *mobilizing* the masses, and was based on their skills in building relations with people. They succeeded in this because they had a 'cause' to defend, a mission to implement and because they had a strong belief in the political formations to which they belonged. It was important for the cadre to be known and trusted by people, to have easy access to

them, to care about them, and to help them when needed. The task needed daily, tiring, time-consuming effort in networking and organizing. These cadres knew their constituency on a personal level and communication depended on face-to-face human contact.

NGOs, by contrast, depend mainly on modern communication methods such as media, workshops and conferences – globalized tools, rather than local ones. These methods are mainly used to 'advocate' or 'educate' a 'target group', usually defined for the period needed to implement the 'project'. Here the constituency is not a natural social group; rather it is abstract, receptive rather interactive. The temporality of the project and the constituency makes it difficult to measure the impact of the intervention. The 'targeting' policy is thus always limited and implemented by professionals hired by the organizations to do the 'job'. This differentiates it from a 'mission' based on conviction and voluntarism. In addition, most NGOs do not set organization or mobilization as goals and they do not act to initiate them.

As for the internal governance of NGOs, a study of more than sixty Palestinian NGOs found that besides the marginal role played by their boards, most of their employees do not participate in the decision-making due to 'their passivity or their lack of competence' (Shalabi 2001: 152). The 'target' groups do not participate in decision-making or drawing up policy either. In many women's NGOs, the staff had nothing to do with the general budget of their organization and did not know how it was distributed. According to Shalabi, the internal governance of the surveyed NGOs was 'a mirror reflection of the Palestinian political system based on individual decision making, patronage and clientelism' and the lack of rules organizing internal relations (Shalabi 2001: 154).

It is important to notice these differences to help clarify the prevailing confusion between social movements and NGOs. In order to have weight or, in political terms, power, a social movement has to be based in large numbers. According to Tarrow, what constitutes social movements is that 'at their base are the social networks and cultural symbols through which social relations are organized. The denser the former and the more familiar the latter, the more likely movements are to spread and be sustained' (1998: 2). He adds that 'contentious collective action is the basis of social movements; not because movements are always violent or extreme, but because it is the main, and often the only recourse that most people possess against better-equipped opponents' (ibid.).

The same can be said of women's movements. There are contrasting views as to what a women's movement is. One kind of movement is that which mobilizes to demand women's suffrage, has a leadership, a member-

ship, and diffuse forms of political activity, as distinct from other forms of solidarity such as those based on networks, clubs or groups. According to Molyneux (1998), a movement also implies a social or political phenomenon of some significance, due both to its numerical size, and to its capacity to effect change in some way or another whether in the legal, cultural, social or political domains. A women's movement does not have to have a single organizational expression and may be characterized by a diversity of interests, forms of expression and spatial location; it can be made up of a substantial majority of women, when not exclusively made up of women (Molyneux 1998). It seems preferable to reserve the term 'movement' for something larger and more effective than small-scale associations. Yet it is important to note that a large number of small associations, even with very diverse agendas, can in cumulative terms come to constitute a women's movement. In that case, it has no central coordinating body nor agreed agenda, although there will be common goals.

The typical structure of NGOs, described above, means that however much they proliferate they cannot sustain and expand a constituency, and find it difficult directly to tackle issues related to social, political or economic rights on a macro or national level. The cases of Sa'ad el-Dine Ibrahim, a seasoned defender of Egyptian 'civil society', and of Eyad Sarraj, a prominent defender of Palestinian human rights, illustrate this difficulty. Both ran NGOs which used the media to raise contentious issues of election fraud and corruption. Both were jailed by their governments. Further analysis of these cases may shed light on the limitations of NGOs as political forces. Big issues such as those they raised need an organized constituency to carry them, otherwise their actions are likely to be seen as stepping beyond legitimate action, and draw authoritarian punishment.

Their single-issue focus of women's NGOs makes it difficult, and perhaps not feasible, to assemble a number together to work towards a common goal – the minimum requirement for the definition of 'women in movement'. The NGO structure appears to create actors with parallel powers based on their recognition at the international level, and on their access to important national and international figures. But this international recognition is not translated into recognition or legitimacy at local and national levels. This creates a competitiveness between NGO directors which makes it hard to compromise or agree on common goals. Although coordination is sometimes possible between NGOs with similar aims, it seems more difficult for NGOs to achieve coordination with women's organizations such as charitable societies and grassroots organizations. NGO leaders, empowered by high levels of education, professional qualifications, and the international development 'lingo', also have a tendency to patronize the others.

These observations are supported by NGO studies in other Third World countries, where proponents of a 'bottom-up' approach argue that the organization of popular pressure and participation from below is a necessary prerequisite for political change and economic progress. They are also extremely sceptical about the ability and willingness of any regime truly to reform itself. Under such conditions, the 'top-down' approach may simply be ineffective, as official donors have to work mainly through the governments of recipient countries. However, under such conditions, the 'bottom-up' approach is also likely to fail, though for different reasons.

Empowering the powerless from below is a time-consuming process. Most importantly, though, it is naïve to assume that participatory development at the grassroots level can be significantly promoted in developing countries whose governments are notoriously unwilling to reform their political and economic systems. If governments are not reform-minded, they will suppress participatory developments wherever they emerge as soon as such developments threaten to undermine the power base of the ruling elites. The experience of NGOs in various countries offers ample evidence to this effect. The 'bottom-up' approach obviously relies on supportive measures by government authorities (Nunnenkamp 1995: 14–15). The evidence from Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries suggests that Arab governments are not willing to introduce reforms and do not. Rather than evidence of a willingness to reform, the recruitment of the wives of presidents and rulers, princesses and prominent women into certain women's NGOs implies that women's single issue rights and claims are seen as apolitical and politically unthreatening, unlikely to touch the political, economic and social foundations of the Arab regimes.

The potential of NGOs to foster participatory developments beyond the grassroots level is fairly small, given the transitory nature of projects. The activities of NGOs are typically project-focused; coordination between NGOs pursuing different aims is weak; and the potential to create change beyond narrowly defined target groups is uncertain at best. All this is in marked contrast to the way that many NGOs have come to adopt 'rights-based approaches' (RBAs) in recent years. Universal women's rights approaches, of which RBAs are an example, are open to the charge that they 'ignore local feminisms and the historical realities of colonialism, but also makes untenable and essentialist assumptions about the sameness of the position of women worldwide' (Nesiah 1996).[2] While we may agree with Coomaraswamy that 'the discourse of women's rights assumes a free, independent woman, an image that may be less powerful in protecting women's rights than other ideologies, such as "women as mothers"' (Coomaraswamy 1994: 55), it is in the weaknesses of the politics of NGOs that the main limitations lie.

NGOs generally lack a sufficiently robust power base to support claims for all women's rights. Adopting a rights-based approach in this context might backfire, providing important grounds for the Islamists, as a powerful social and political movement in the region, to discredit and delegitimize these claims. In a context of unachieved national independence, as in the case of Palestine, for example, separating women's rights from collective national rights might inadvertently lead to the marginalization of women as a social group and subsequently to the fragmentation of the group. The approach adopted by many Arab women's NGOs, based on individual and universal women's rights, worked on the assumption that social power rests with the state and not in other social and political groups opposing and competing with it (i.e. the Islamists). This approach, based on international conventions, usually ignores to a great extent home-grown, locally developed feminisms and the historical realities of different layers of colonialism and Occupation and the roles imposed upon, or accepted by, women (Nesiah 1996).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the role attributed by UN agencies and international development organizations to Arab women's NGOs as a vehicle for democratization and participatory-based development needs to be reassessed through empirical studies, and not pursued on the basis of the old dichotomies of West versus East. Arab women's NGOs might be able to play a role in advocating Arab women's rights in the international arena, provide services for certain needy groups, propose new policies and visions, and generate and disseminate information. But, in order to effect a comprehensive, sustainable development and democratization, a different form of organization is needed with a different, locally grounded vision, and a more sustainable power base for social change.

Notes

1 The analysis in this chapter draws on an empirical study of different forms of social organizations in Palestine and elsewhere in the Arab World required for my PhD thesis submitted to the University of London (SOAS) in August 2004.

2 See Phillips (1993), Voet (1998), Charlesworth and Chinkin (2000) for other discussions of the problems of universal women's rights approaches.

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15 | Political fiction meets gender myth: post-conflict reconstruction, 'democratization' and women's rights

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It is possible to identify at least two distinct clusters of concerns in feminist engagement with development. The first contains a vigorous internal critique of how the concepts, tools and frameworks generated through scholarly and policy engagement with gender have fared in the real world of development practice.

The second cluster of concerns centres on the process of development itself and the ways in which changes in global economic and political conjunctures modify the very terms of the debates we engage in. Starting in the 1980s with the DAWN initiative, there has been an enduring preoccupation with issues of global inequality and the limits these place on human flourishing – for both women and men. What types of agenda for gender justice are we to adopt in the face of glaring global disparities in wealth and power? Are the gains implicit in standard-setting instruments and gender equality guidelines, however imperfect their implementation, secure in a global climate of conservatism and social and religious polarization? What precisely does 'empowerment' mean in the context of neo-liberal policies that restrict access to basic services and social safety-nets? This strand of critique is evident in feminist interrogations of the gendered effects of macro-economic policies (UNRISD 2005) and in more recent scholarship on democratization and the 'good governance' agenda. We must add another important question to these concerns: what happens in contexts where development and humanitarian aid have been reconceptualized as tools for the promotion of global security (Duffield 2001)?

An area that presents us with persistent challenges of both a conceptual and practical nature is the attempts to accommodate a women's rights agenda in conflict and post-conflict situations. Many cases have entered our political lexicon under the somewhat misleading label of 'failed states' to refer to countries torn by war and internal strife with collapsed, decayed or vestigial apparatuses of governance and political economies that are often driven by illicit trade in arms, narcotics and primary commodities. These challenges are augmented, in the case of Iraq, by the potential casualties of a policy of armed 'democratization' and regime change.

Gender issues are becoming politicized in novel and often counter-productive ways in a geo-political context where armed interventions usher in new blueprints for governance underwritten by international donors – and where gender mainstreaming and women's rights are folded into a package of donor-driven prescriptions. The difficulties of developing a principled feminist response (and an appropriate politics of solidarity) in the face of these developments must be self-evident. Indeed, debates within transnational feminist constituencies about the plight of women in Afghanistan proved to be divisive.[1] These exchanges followed the familiar tropes of women's rights as universal human rights vs 'feminism-as-imperialism', reflected in a spate of articles both in the popular press and in academic journals (Abu-Lughod 2002; Arat-Koc 2002; Moghadam 2002; Viner 2002; Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002). While some denounced intervention in the name of Muslim women's rights as an extension of imperial meddling, others highlighted the hypocrisy inherent in sanctioning oppression in the name of cultural relativism. There was, however, broad consensus over the effects of policies that channelled massive support to *mujahidin* groups, often to the most extremist among them, as part of the United States' Cold War strategy. The fact that gross abuses of human rights, including extreme forms of gender-based violence, under the *mujahidin* were barely noted (Niland 2004), and that aid agencies and NGOs were themselves complicit in this strategic silence (Goodhand 2002), inevitably enhanced perceptions of self-serving instrumentalism when an outcry about women's rights accompanied Operation Enduring Freedom. When women's rights become implicated in the geo-political manoeuvring of powerful global actors, it is small wonder that they elicit a degree of scepticism.

In Afghanistan, attempts at post-conflict institution-building and peace consolidation are taking place against the background of unstable political settlements between competing factions, some of which explicitly target women's rights as an area over which they are in no mood for compromise. Security and the rule of law are signally lacking: alongside continuing armed attacks by insurgents, schools go up in flames in many parts of the country and NGO personnel and women face substantial risks (Oates and Solon Helal 2004). How does gender advocacy play out in instances where the gap between the technical solutions offered by gender mainstreaming and the social and political preconditions for an expansion of women's rights remains alarmingly wide? Does it open up new spaces and empower actors whose voices would otherwise remain muted? Is it simply ignored or marginalized? Do gender advocacy and the 'real world' of politics coexist in parallel universes? Or does the very existence of such a gap create its own dynamic with unpredictable consequences? Although a great deal of

detailed work is necessary to obtain precise, context-specific answers to these questions, some preliminary observations may assist further debate and dialogue.

Parallel universes? Gender mainstreaming and the 'real world' of politics

If we take seriously the proposition that the state must be a central instrument for the protection of rights (Molyneux and Razavi 2002), contexts where primary state functions such as the provision of basic social services are offloaded on to humanitarian and international aid organizations certainly present specific challenges. In a fragmented polity, where the central government does not have a monopoly over the means of violence and in the absence of a functioning judiciary system, the concept of 'mainstreaming' may beg the question unless it is narrowly understood as a practice embraced by donors in their own programming. These programming priorities have significant implications in countries where international assistance accounts for a substantial part of licit national revenue, although it is widely acknowledged that informal flows (from remittances and illicit cross-border trade) play an even larger role. New types of humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping operations have created a demand for operational procedures that include a recognition of the gender-differentiated outcomes of war and humanitarian crises (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). This recognition was enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (October 2000), stressing the need to address gender issues in peace-building and peacekeeping efforts. Agencies have accordingly developed their own 'toolkit' for the integration of a gender perspective into humanitarian and recovery interventions at the project level (UNDP 2001). More ambitious efforts at institutional reform and state-building have also involved prescriptions for gender mainstreaming.[2]

However, donor-led gender mainstreaming efforts and the institutional architecture they attempt to put in place comes up against the world of 'real' politics. In Afghanistan, institutions of global governance, the UN system in particular, demand compliance with the various international conventions and standard-setting instruments that underwrite women's human rights. Gender advisers in bilateral and multilateral agencies work with government ministries and NGOs offering training, technical assistance and working on 'capacity-building' more generally. This expenditure of financial and organizational resources is taking place against the background of extreme poverty in a war-ravaged country where donor activity inevitably raises popular expectations of rapid betterment and relief.

While international agencies compete for their share of the 'gender'

market, drawing upon limited local capacity to staff their own projects, politicians are more interested in producing rapid results that bolster their ability to extend patronage and secure a following. Ministerial and government personnel are likewise prone to 'talk the talk' in matters pertaining to gender and in their interactions with international staff, while pursuing their own agendas.[3] Some focus on a fundamental lack of understanding of Afghan 'culture' on the part of outsiders as the major stumbling block for gender-focused international aid (Abirafeh 2005). There is, however, a great deal more to these interactions than an inability on the part of international agencies to strike the right 'cultural' note. They are also indicative of the limitations of top-down managerial blueprints (which also include the blueprints for 'bottom-up' participatory approaches) in the absence of substantive local ownership in a complex and fluid situation. The managerial objectives pursued by international aid agencies – with their limited timeframes and specification of outputs – and the strategies of political actors on the ground may produce genuine contradictions and reveal profound differences in understanding about the means and meaning of ownership and empowerment. There is little room for recognition and negotiation of these differences. A strong argument has been made to the effect that the aid system in Afghanistan undermines rather than supports state effectiveness (Ghani et al. 2005) but a genuine dialogue on these matters is yet to start. Meanwhile, some of the most powerful internal political actors remain uncompromising on the interpretation of Islamic laws and have been vocally opposed to introducing changes in women's status. Mindful of these tensions, the *National Development Framework* (Government of Afghanistan 2002: 96) treated the paragraph on 'gender' with extreme caution: 'all programs must pay special attention to gender, and not include it as an afterthought. We have to engage in a societal dialogue to enhance the opportunities of women and improve cooperation between men and women on the basis of *our culture, the experience of other Islamic countries, and the global norms of human rights*' (emphasis added).

These qualifications carefully frame the terms of the societal dialogue, while glossing over potential contradictions between them. Donor-supported attempts to secure and expand women's rights in the absence of a stable political settlement between an aid-dependent government and fractious opposition groups, including *jihadi* factions that invoke the primacy of the Shar'ia (Islamic religious law), have resulted in a delicate balancing act in the drafting of the constitution ratified in January 2004. Article 7 requires that the state of Afghanistan 'abide by the UN Charter, international treaties, international conventions that Afghanistan has signed,

and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. These conventions include CEDAW (the Convention for All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) which was ratified without reservations in March 2003. Article 22 on 'Basic Rights and Non-discrimination' makes explicit reference to full equality of men and women before the law. (This wording was introduced as an important amendment to the original draft which referred to 'citizens' without specifying gender.) Article 83, which offers an important constitutional guarantee for the political participation of women by reserving a quota of 25 per cent of the seats in the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of Parliament) and 17 per cent in the upper house, was hailed as a major step forward.

On the other hand, Article 3 on 'Islam and Constitutionality' states that 'no law can be contrary to the beliefs and the provisions of the sacred religion of Islam'. This article, along with its affiliate which declares Afghanistan an Islamic state, is not subject to amendment. The constitution gives the Supreme Court the authority to determine whether laws and treaties made by the government are in accordance with the constitution, giving it the power to reject any law or treaty deemed un-Islamic.[4]

Comparisons with the constitutional process in Iraq are instructive. These suggest that the process of 'democratization' may result in an erosion of women's existing legal rights. Women's demands for representation and for quotas were consistently rejected by the US administration and a 'target' of 25 per cent of parliamentary seats being occupied by women was stipulated by the Transitional Administrative law, falling far short of the original demands of women's groups. Although Resolution 137 passed by the Interim Governing Coalition in December 2003 (and proposing a return to pre-1959 legislation) did not enter into force, it polarized opinions between women's rights activists vehemently opposed to retreating from the secular code of 1959 and religiously-oriented Shi'ite and Sunni women favouring a return to Shar'ia law. The provision that no law may be passed that contradicts the rules of Islam and the role of the Supreme Federal Court in overseeing the constitutionality of legislation mirrors the provisions of the constitution of Afghanistan. In both cases, the tight relationship between religious doctrine and the judiciary potentially opens the way to 'hard-line' interpretations of Shar'ia law.

The 'federalization' of the Iraqi political system, and the fact that women's rights within the family are not elaborated in the constitution, may lead to Lebanese-style implementation of different personal status legislation in different regions. This gives rise to legitimate concerns over the effects of the 'communalization' of politics on women's citizenship rights (Pratt 2005). The increasing social conservatism affecting women's attire and mobility, while a partial result of the deteriorating security