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Global Women's Movements in Changing Societies

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SEIDA SARIC



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Critical Half is a bi-annual journal of Women for Women International devoted to the exchange of ideas and insight encountered by practitioners in the fields of gender, development, conflict, and post-conflict reconstruction. Each issue of *Critical Half* focuses on a particular topic within the field of gender and development. Past issues of the journal and calls for papers for upcoming issues can be found on our website at www.womenforwomen.org.

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CriticalHalf

GLOBAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN CHANGING SOCIETIES

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Reflections from the Board of Editors

Throughout history, it has been made clear, time and time again, that for women's rights agendas to move forward, women must get organized and remain determined to make change happen. Currently, we are facing a global crisis that significantly affects not only the economic and financial systems but, most importantly, food security, environmental sustainability, energy and the important progress achieved on social development and human rights around the world. Many have said that this world crisis, however, also presents windows of opportunities for change. Therefore, we must continue to strengthen and build women's organizations and movements that can not only defend what we have achieved so far in the struggle for gender equality but can also generate alternatives to the current hegemonic models of development, security, and environmental sustainability to build a different world.

As women have organized and built movements over the years to advance their rights, their efforts have become increasingly diverse. This has been due to, among other factors, the increasing reach of feminism and claims for rights by diverse sectors of women, which has resulted in different types of movement building by women, from the very grassroots to the international level. The shapes, sizes, structures, membership, strategies used, and visions of transformation of current women's organizations and movements have become much more complex and, of course, are highly determined by the various contexts in which they operate.

Women today engage in more transnational organizing than they did 30 years ago. The global nature of current women's movements is evident not only in initiatives that have presence or relevance in multiple countries or regions but also in the types of issues addressed and the approaches used to do their work. For example, issues like migration or the rising role of China in the world economy and

geopolitics are clearly issues of concern to more than one particular country or region and represent global challenges. Similarly, some emerging women's organizations take global approaches to problems affecting women of an ethnic or national diaspora, women from occupied territories, indigenous women, or women with disabilities, to name just a few. All of these are different expressions of women's organizing that brings their own perspectives and strategies to their particular issues but that simultaneously traverse national, regional, and ethnic boundaries.

Although some of these new initiatives have been documented, we still have a lot to learn from them, particularly how they conceptualize the current struggles to advance women's rights (from their particular situations or locations and the issues they work on), the types of strategies they use, and the way they understand and build movements. This learning is key to strengthening the work of all feminist and progressive women's movements worldwide. Within these initiatives are some of the most innovative ideas and actions we need to renew our visions and strategies and re-energize our work.

The articles included in this issue of the journal are a testimony to the diversity and increasing complexity of how this organizing takes place and the challenges different women's groups face. By sharing their stories with so many of us, the authors increase the visibility of some of these initiatives and expand our knowledge and understanding of how diverse women from different parts of the world are tackling the current challenges of advancing women's rights worldwide.

Lydia Alpízar Durán

Executive Director

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

In this issue of *Critical Half*

Strong societies are made up of active citizens - women and men who use their voices to energize the public, engage all populations, and foster cooperation among all community members. Women's movements all over the globe have been creating and encouraging active citizenship among diverse populations for centuries. Building on years of activism and advances in travel and communications technology, the Global Women's Movement is now on the cusp of a new phase, one that emphasizes women's empowerment and engagement worldwide.

Building a gender-equitable world requires change from both the top down and the bottom up. Up to this point, there have been a number of disparate movements, many of them particularly focused on changes to national and international law. While there have been great successes in this area, the Global Women's Movement can be an even more powerful agent for sustainable change if it can find new ways to engage on the grassroots level while continuing to advance rights at the top. Until the gap is bridged between the realities on the ground and the laws and policies on the books, the gains from women's movements will not be fully realized. Faced with increasing militarism, fundamentalism, and dire economic conditions, the world stands to benefit from the transformative power of a unified, integrated Global Women's Movement now more than ever.

Whether they aim globally or locally, successful movements address grassroots needs and understand grassroots realities. Different grassroots realities all over the globe give rise to individuals and groups with diverse methods, resources, communities, and supporters that are now informing and shaping the next phase of the Global Women's Movement. Building a movement is similar to creating a delicious meal. A single recipe never produces the same result when cooked by different chefs. Each context adds unique flavors and integrates different key ingredients that can lead to powerful results.

The Global Women's Movement has never been one singular movement but rather multiple and diverse movements, each operating and based in different on-the-ground realities. For a united movement to emerge, it is important for groups to articulate arguments for gender equity from different economic, political, and cultural perspectives in order to accurately highlight the multifaceted nature of many global women's issues.

Understanding movements and learning from previous phases equips us to build a unified stage of the Global Women's Movement that understands the female way of leading and promotes women leaders at all levels of society. Rather than highlighting and lamenting women's struggles, this global movement needs to have three focuses: 1) communicating women's capability, emphasizing that investing in women is good for everyone, 2) engaging men as equal partners, and 3) implementing and engaging at the grassroots level. The global community can thrive when each part is engaged equally and productively. This is particularly true in conflict and post-conflict societies where violence and war have muted women and isolated them, preventing them from engaging with and rebuilding their communities. Women's exclusion robs these conflict-affected societies of their most powerful tools for peaceful transformation.

An inclusive approach to the Global Women's Movement can provide the space for women to speak out. Grassroots work empowers women to tell their narratives, to be seen and be heard. This empowerment creates connections between public civil society discourse and elite policy discourse. By engaging locally, women contribute to the dialogue globally. The rapid progression of communications and technology can only increase the vital interaction and cooperation between activists from the less-developed global East and South with those in the more-developed West and North, allowing women's groups to compare recipes for change and face the challenges of effectively engaging across varied contexts.

As gender issues have gained international recognition and inclusion in the work of general human rights and justice organizations, it is important to ensure that the voices and contributions of women remain at the forefront of gender equality efforts. We can embrace traditional *and* non-traditional strategies for transformation, and celebrate diversity and inclusion as necessary agents for change. This issue of *Critical Half* is dedicated to exploring some of these movements, the contributions they make and the challenges they face. The articles featured in this issue represent the diversity of groups and individuals participating in the Global Women's Movement, underscoring the unique way it embraces and incorporates varied perspectives.

The opening article, "Advancing Women's Rights in Pakistan: Strategies of Women's NGOs," shows some of the challenges women's groups working in traditional societies face. The author, Afshan Jafar, demonstrates how women's NGOs advocate for change by using traditional notions about gender roles and positing women's issues as community issues. The article highlights the importance of contextualizing local women's movements and recognizes that even when engaging in practices that are typically disfavored by other women's advocates, the groups in Pakistan share commonalities with global groups that understand that gender inclusion is critical for alleviating systemic crises like persistent poverty, social and political marginalization, and the spread of violence.

The next three articles demonstrate just a few of the many different ways women are engaging with movements locally and globally. "Women's Participation in Mexican 'ROSCAs': A Case Study," provides statistical data and analysis of the ways women overcome socioeconomic marginalization by participating in informal financial markets, such as rotating savings and credit associations. The authors, Kristiano Raccanello, Jayant Anand, and Patricia Arroyo Martínez, note that women as a group were more committed to fulfilling their commitments to the credit organizations than men were and how women use ROSCAs to create social networks and social capital. Then, Dr. Yingyi Ma explores

the history and potential of the Chinese women's movement in "The Chinese Women's Movement: From State Control to Independent Global Participation." This piece explains how the women's movement in China has evolved and interacted with global women's movements. Next, Dr. J. Shantz describes the burgeoning anti-Olympics movement in Canada being led by Indigenous women. This article, "The Emergence of a New Global Movement: Women's Opposition to the 2010 Winter Olympics" reiterates the power of movements to connect diverse communities and to start locally and grow globally.

The role of globalization is a recurrent theme in the articles in this issue, and the next two articles address the relationship between globalization and women's movements. Abby Gondek's article, "Identity Crisis: Integrating a Brazilian Women's Union in a Global Political Movement," addresses the challenges of fighting the injustices of globalization while remaining focused on the specific needs of women and maintaining a group identity. The article examines the multiple ideological spaces that women's groups inhabit and the problems of focusing on more than one set of priorities. "Global Women's Movements and Transnational Feminism: A View from the South" by Dr. Amanda Gouws analyzes the ways globalization both enables cross-border movement building and inhibits women's solidarity within the borders of countries where there is competition for resources. Continuing the discussion of cross-border organizing, "The Transnational Kurdish Women's Movement Against Honor Killings" explores how the Kurdish women's movement, both in Iraq and in the Kurdish diaspora, has helped shape the current battle against honor-related violence. Claire R. Thomas examines how a movement's tactics and issues spread across borders and communities, gaining strength through collaboration and cooperation.

Traditionally, each issue of *Critical Half* closes with a contribution from one of our chapter offices. In this issue, Seida Saric, the Country Director of Women for Women International–Bosnia and Herzegovina, shares her experiences working with women transitioning from conflict in Bosnia and

Herzegovina to self-sufficiency, reconstruction, and community development. This piece reflects the grassroots realities that must be addressed for women's movements to take hold and grow in societies with resource and cultural challenges.

In the spirit of Women for Women International, as we all try to define the unifying issues and framework of a new Global Women's Movement, I hope this issue of *Critical Half* helps to trigger discussion. This is a very exciting time when we are all ripe for new ideas and methods. We need to learn from one another and remain open to the possibilities raised by these articles and others.

In conclusion, I would like to thank our Board of Editors: Lydia Alpizar Durán, Dr. Alex Otieno,

Norah Matovu Winyi, and Dr. Sawitri Saharso. Each Board member's thoughtful contributions strengthened the articles in this issue. Finally, Women for Women International is deeply grateful to all our supporters, participants, employees, and sponsors. It is your ongoing interest in women's movements around the world that makes this publication possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ZS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Zainab Salbi
Founder and CEO

Women for Women International

WOMEN'S NGOs IN PAKISTAN OFTEN FACE CHALLENGES THAT OTHER NGOs DO NOT, simply because they focus on women's issues. In Pakistan's conservative environment, women's NGOs in particular are seen as upsetting the social balance. This article discusses one of the most important challenges facing women's NGOs in Pakistan—how to advance women's rights and make gender issues a priority among the masses in a context where other issues are seen as more urgent. Using data gathered from collaboration with three Pakistani NGOs over a six-month time period, this article discusses the strategies that Pakistani women's NGOs use to make their messages and their agendas more appealing to the general population. These strategies include positing women's issues as community issues and using traditional notions about women's nature to advance change. The article also briefly discusses how some of those strategies may be subject to feminist criticism as being too compromising.

Advancing Women's Rights in Pakistan: Strategies of Women's NGOs

AFSHAN JAFAR

Introduction

Women's Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) first proliferated in Pakistan under the oppressive military dictatorship of General Zia ul-Huq between 1977 and 1988. Although charitable and welfare organizations have had a long history on the Indian sub-continent, advocacy NGOs saw an upsurge in the latter half of the 1980s. Never before had the rights of minorities and women been threatened so overtly as under Zia ul-Huq's rule, and many individuals came together in the form of advocacy NGOs to fight government repression.¹ This period also coincided with a tendency among donors to promote a "women in development" component in their funded projects, as well as a preference to put donor funds in the hands of non-state actors like NGOs. All of these forces together resulted in an increase in the number of strong advocacy-oriented women's organizations in Pakistan by the late 1980s.

But the struggle for women's rights in Pakistan, spearheaded by women's NGOs, has been met with much resistance since then. Women's NGOs in Pakistan often face challenges that other NGOs do not, simply because they focus on women's issues. In Pakistan's conservative environment, women's NGOs in particular are seen as upsetting the social balance. This article examines one of the unique challenges facing women's NGOs in Pakistan: how to advance women's rights and make gender issues a priority among the masses in a context where these issues are not seen as urgent. Given the resistance at the grassroots that women's NGOs face, the

article also explores the strategies that these NGOs are using to ensure their survival and effectiveness.² How do they make their messages and their agendas more appealing?

Gathering Data

For a period of six months in 2004 (January–June), I interacted with three women's NGOs in Pakistan as both a participant and an observer. This lengthy participation-observation period enabled me to see how the goals and agendas of NGOs are actually put into practice, and how they change over time. I gained access to the organizations' mission statements, project reports, pamphlets, posters, video tapes, and music CDs. I also participated at some of the NGOs' meetings and activities. During the same six-month period, I also conducted 28 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with people working in each of the four provinces of Pakistan. The interviewees were members and leaders of eight women's NGOs, government officials involved directly or indirectly with civil society organizations, and representatives from three donor agencies. Interviewing members of different groups connected to women's NGOs enabled me to obtain a comprehensive picture of the issues facing the organizations, not just from an insider's perspective as a participant-observer, but also from the outside.

Challenges for Women's NGOs

While all NGOs face problems in Pakistan, NGOs advancing women's issues face unique challenges.³ One of the most important challenges

is determining how to get people to make gender concerns and women's rights a priority. Zabia, a young woman working in an NGO in Baluchistan reported the following during an interview: "At first people did not even understand that there was work to be done on such issues as the welfare of women." Obviously, this type of thinking is a major obstacle in furthering women's rights. However, it is important to emphasize that it would be a mistake to conclude that this thinking reflects a lack of awareness or consciousness. Many people, including women, may not feel that their problems arise out of gender discrimination or patriarchal values. Instead, they may believe, for example, that their oppression rests in poverty and class inequality. Zabia's experience trying to establish resource centers for women exemplifies this issue:

When the centers were first established, we ran into a lot of difficulties because we had to gather the women once or twice a month in one place, so that they would come and listen to the newspaper.... They used to say, "In the time it takes us to come here and listen to the newspaper, we could be doing some embroidery or other work"They wanted to know how it would benefit them [materially] to come....

In effect, what Pakistani women's NGOs face in the field is the *intersectionality* of oppression. In other words, people do not separate the causes of their disempowerment into patriarchy or poverty, for example. Nor do these different forms of oppression act independently of one another. It is the sum of all their oppressions that leads women to a state of disempowerment. So even though the causes of poverty may be very different from those of gender injustice and subordination, they remain, as the social economist Naila Kabeer puts it, "empirically seamless."⁴ Thus, asking people to identify or rank one form of oppression compared to another is not only difficult but perhaps even unreasonable. For why should women show allegiance to or preference for fighting one cause when there are so many?

Furthermore, ideals of equality with men may seem useless in a context of extreme poverty, where the need for basic amenities—food, water, shelter, healthcare—may far outweigh the need for equality with men, who themselves are impoverished and often powerless.⁵ Given this context, what strategies do Pakistani women's NGOs use to advance agendas targeting gender concerns and women's rights? How are these strategies viewed by feminists?

Strategies

Instrumentalism: Address the Larger Goal

One strategy that women's NGOs in Pakistan rely on is to make use of instrumentalism; that is, advancing ideas that argue for women's rights in order to achieve something larger. For instance, in the campaign to increase women's political participation in Pakistan, women's involvement in the political process is not advanced as a radical, self-serving idea. Instead, women's political involvement is promoted as a means to achieve something else: more honest government, or more progress. I often heard NGO workers state that the involvement of women in the development process was necessary because they comprised 50 percent of the population and are in essence an "untapped resource." To alleviate poverty and achieve social and economic progress, women's potential and resourcefulness have to be fully utilized, they argue.

Essentialism: Emphasize Women's "Nature"

Another strategy among women's NGOs is to make use of essentialist notions about the "nature" of women. For example, they use the commonly held belief that women are "naturally" less corrupt than men to campaign for women's increased participation in politics. Women's NGOs also draw upon the belief that women are less aggressive and more virtuous than men to argue that their participation will help bring about peace and a more honest form of politics in Pakistan.

I found evidence of this type of essentialism again in the inspirational political songs produced by women NGOs. Some of the lyrics discuss the differences that women could make through political

participation. The messages are of hope, change, and more security. One song, titled "The Time for Voting is Here," states: "We asked them to build us roads, instead they raced their Pajeros here and cast mud on us.... We asked them for clean water, instead they built a factory and poisoned our water...." The song goes on to state how women will elect politicians who are committed to "reduce inflation, give us clean water, give us cheap medical care and establish schools in our villages."⁶

The aim of these songs is to raise awareness about women's leadership potential and what they can offer to society. They assert that women would *naturally* choose people who are honest and trustworthy, and who work for the betterment of society. In other words, if the living conditions in parts of Pakistan are deplorable, it is because men have been making decisions that are not in the interests of the people.

Sumaira, another NGO worker in the province of Baluchistan, told me about the accomplishments of the women councilors in her area:

They built roads, they built sewers, they put up street lights. They said [to men], "What do you think, we women can't do these things?" Of course we can, and we can do it a lot better than men. Men contract out the work to other people and keep half the commission themselves and spend only half of the money on actual construction. The women said, "Look, when we women make up our minds to do something then we do it really well. And we oversee every aspect ourselves. We don't just look at the quantity; we also consider the quality."

Sumaira also pointed out to me why she felt women were successful when they did go into the public arena: "The few women who have come out in [Sibi, Baluchistan] have struggled for everybody. They are not in this for themselves. They have come together [as a group]."

In the above examples, women's issues are pushed forward not on the basis of equality but

by demonstrating that empowering women will benefit everybody and not just the women in question. The previous quotations, for example, not only emphasize the "different" nature of women, but argue that society in general will benefit from incorporating women into the development and political processes and from making use of their feminine nature.

Posit Women's Issues as Community Issues

To frame their argument, women's NGOs also "package" their agenda to shift the focus away from women in particular to society in general. Such arguments are also more easily accepted by the communities that are the focus of NGOs. Thus, NGO workers must contextualize their agenda to the local needs and issues identified by the people if they wish to build a relationship with the community. Azhar, an NGO worker in the southern province of Sindh, stated: "Our experience tells us that unless you focus on the ground realities, understand them, and are involved with them, you will not be able to go to work in that area...you have to work with the atmosphere, the political, social set-up of a given place."

Other NGO workers pointed out that when approaching a new community, they often start with "safe" topics, such as income generation or healthcare, to gain the trust of the community. Sumaira revealed: "We started with health and education, our basic necessities—we talked about water and sanitation, whatever *their* problems were, so that they would not think that we came there to talk about our specific agenda and would leave soon after." Sumaira also had the following to say:

[W]e met with the...leaders of the community and explained to them: "We are not here to lead your women astray. We are here to give them information... we will give them information on home remedies...and cooking recipes." Because we could not talk about anything else right away...we said: "They'll learn new recipes, and how to deal with illnesses at home" ... we talked a lot about health...they asked

for a doctor, so we took lady doctors in our next few visits...and a lot of women came to discuss their health issues...slowly, very slowly...over the years we started broaching the issue of violence and even then only in certain areas.

Azhar also discussed similar experiences:

We don't just raise issues relevant to women alone, but we also address those issues that are relevant at the local level. For example, if they have a water problem, a sanitation problem, health problems, then we highlight those issues as well...so when people see these things [that the NGO is doing], they realize that these are general efforts for both men and women.... Our first words in a community are always that [this NGO] is not turning people against men, it is struggling against certain attitudes and that is our war.

NGO workers have to present women's issues in a manner that does not seem threatening to the local community. And when women's issues are presented as issues that are relevant to the entire community, women's NGOs and their workers are welcomed instead of being met with suspicion.

Conclusion

Although the strategies discussed above are often seen by feminists as compromises or just outright "non-feminist" in nature, women's NGOs in Pakistan have adopted them as practical and effective in the context in which they are operating. The use of essentialism, for example, is cause for concern for many feminists.⁷ They argue that women's rights based on women's more virtuous "nature" is problematic. It entrenches the very ideas and definitions of woman and womanhood that feminists have sought to deconstruct. Further, it relegates the differences between men and women not necessarily to the social and cultural realm,

but to the natural one. Only in this instance, the natural differences are promoted for the benefit of women.

Similarly, if promoting instrumental approaches of focusing on achieving goals larger than women's rights are as limited as many feminists have argued, then why are they so popular in the world of activism? As my interviewees pointed out and many scholars have discussed, such arguments seem the least threatening to policy-makers and decision-makers, and they generate the least resistance since they subsume the feminist agenda and make it less visible.⁸

Examining the various strategies employed by women's NGOs in Pakistan reveals that while feminism may have some universal principles engrained in its ideology, the path to achieving those ideals cannot be universal. When looking at different models of activism on behalf of women, we need to ask ourselves: What does feminism mean in *this* context? What should be the aims of women's organizations and the women's movement given the particular history and political, social, and economic structures of the women's communities? What are the movement's aims? What can they be? To criticize certain strategies as non-feminist, or as too compromising, ignores the difficult "ground realities" that women's NGOs face everyday. As Farah, the Director of an international NGO in Pakistan, asked during a workshop: "We're starting at the bottom, so even if we lift ourselves an inch, it is better than where we started off. Why do we expect to reach the ceiling right away?" If we keep this context in mind, it becomes very clear that the so-called "feminist compromises" are some of the most effective ways that women's NGOs can further women's rights in the context of Pakistan.

AFSHAN JAFAR Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Connecticut College. Her articles have appeared in *Social Problems*, *Gender Issues*, and *Sexuality and Culture*. She is currently working on a book about the challenges facing women's NGOs in Pakistan.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 See Jafar, 2005; Khan, 2000; Khan, 2001; Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1987.
- 2 See Jafar, 2007 for an in-depth analysis of the resistance faced by women's NGOs in Pakistan.
- 3 It is difficult to distinguish between the women's movement and women's NGOs in Pakistan since members of the women's movement most often also belong to NGOs. Thus the strategies of NGOs are in many ways also the strategies of the women's movement in Pakistan.
- 4 See Kabeer, 1994:13.
- 5 See Kabeer, 1994; Sen and Grown, 1987.
- 6 Pajeros (sport utility vehicles) and factories are both status symbols of rich men in Pakistan. This song seems to be alluding to the class oppression of these women as well as their gender oppression. It implies that their own men have been complicit in perpetuating this class oppression by arguing that women will now choose the "right" kind of politician. This argument essentializes men just as much as it essentializes women. It ignores the different forms of oppression that men may be facing due to their class or ethnic or religious backgrounds.
- 7 See Kabeer, 1994; Mohanty, 1991; Sen and Grown, 1987.
- 8 See Buvinic, 1983; Razavi, 1998; Naciri, 1998.

PARTICIPATING IN ROTATING SAVINGS AND CREDIT ASSOCIATIONS (ROSCAs) CAN HELP POOR WOMEN OVERCOME SOCIO-ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION. Empirical findings from Mexico corroborate the view that women—who, as a group, may be considered among the poorest citizens in the world—have the agency to improve their socio-economic plight through their participation in informal microfinance groups like ROSCAs. Based on descriptive statistics compiled from a survey of 400 individuals conducted in June and July 2006 in Mexico, this article explores the nature of ROSCAs, the role they play in women’s lives, and the role women play in the vitality of ROSCAs. Importantly, women may use ROSCAs not only to help them overcome their financial hardships, they may also use the groups to create social capital through networking and relationship-building.

Women's Participation in Mexican "ROSCAs": A Case Study

KRISTIANO RACCANELLO, JAYANT ANAND, AND PATRICIA ARROYO MARTÍNEZ

Introduction

Poor people around the world are exposed to many risks that have either direct or indirect economic consequences. For example, an individual's poor health may not only result in his or her lower household income but the lower income may also provoke the poor health. Similarly, a lack of educational facilities results in low-paying jobs for the uneducated and perpetuates the cycle of poverty.¹ Among the economically disadvantaged, the most vulnerable are perhaps women, especially in developing countries.² Their social exploitation also marginalizes them economically.³

Historically, the economically disadvantaged have been excluded from participating in formal credit markets. This is because formal credit-granting agencies generally view credit as a production input rather than as a resource for mitigating gaps in income. However, such exclusion does not mean that the poor do not need credit but that they must turn instead to informal sources of credit, such as personal networks (relatives and friends), moneylenders, pawnbrokers, and Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs)⁴ to finance consumption.⁵

ROSCAs can be traced back to at least the 13th century and have existed in many parts of the world.⁶ Rotating credit associations are called by various names around the globe, e.g., *cheetu* (or chit fund) in India, *hui* in China, and *tanda* in Mexico. A ROSCA is a group of individuals who agree to come together, at regular intervals and usually for a defined period of time, with the intent of saving

through contributing to a common fund. The amount so collected—the "pot"—is then auctioned (or assigned through a random or non-random selection process) to one group member in each collection cycle.⁷ In this system, each member has only one chance to receive the pooled amount, and the association lasts till every member has had a chance at the "pot." Thus, members alternate between being lenders and borrowers.

Although a ROSCA could be subject to abuse by individual members, most end up being fairly successful, probably because of careful selection of members⁸ and the fact that members consider paying back the lump sum they receive from the ROSCA when it's their turn as a social obligation.⁹ Group cohesion is an important element in ROSCAs because as group size increases, the level of interaction and intimacy between members decreases;¹⁰ thus, most ROSCAs have between 10 and 20 members.¹¹

Women, who are among the world's poorest citizens, actively participate in ROSCAs, and most ROSCA members also happen to be women.¹² Women also tend to show a lower level of confidence in accepting men as association members¹³ because male-dominated ROSCAs tend to have a higher rate of failure due to lack of commitment from the male members¹⁴ and the commonly held notion that men do not like to cooperate and to follow rules made by women.¹⁵

The Survey and Its Results

After a pilot survey, the questionnaire was

implemented during the months of June and July of 2006. For convenience, we selected a representative sample of 400 persons living in the municipality of San Andrés Cholula, a semi-rural town in Puebla, Mexico, who were participating in ROSCAs at that time or who had done so in the previous three years.

The survey questionnaire was divided into three sections: the socio-economic characteristics of the households surveyed, the participation of the surveyed individuals in ROSCAs, and trust among ROSCA members.

Households' Socio-Economic Characteristics

Of the 400 respondents, 57.3% were women. Most of the interviewees were married (57.9% of men and 47.6% of women). No significant differences among households' socio-economic characteristics were found; on average, each household consisted of four individuals, with two earning members.

Men had higher education levels with only 32.2% of the sample having less than or equal to a high school education. This proportion was 48% for women. Additionally, 28.7% of men and 14% women had earned a bachelor's degree.

Gender differences in employment were also striking. Men (67.8%) were mostly employed in the formal economic sector while more women were employed in the informal sector (38.4%). Only women were engaged in unpaid housework (16.2%). Both men and women reported that males contributed the larger share of income in the household, although the percentages of agreement were different (85.4% vs. 62% respectively).

An important element that could explain the greater female participation in ROSCAs is women's lower monthly disposable income after covering all expenses and debts. We found that women reported having a monthly average of 1,361MXP (Mexican peso), while men reported a substantially higher average (2,266MXP)—during June and July 2006, the exchange rate was approximately 11.20MXP=1USD. When comparing total household incomes among the sample group, no

significant differences were detected. However, gender segmentation revealed individual disposable income disparities: 39.7% of women had an income of less than 2,400MXP per month (vs. 8.8% of men) and 80.4% women had less than 7,200MXP per month (vs. 56.7% of men).

Household total savings were low: at the time of the survey, 42.1% of men and 50.2% women had less than 5,700MXP saved. This could suggest that women from households with low savings would be more likely to participate in ROSCAs.

We also found a gendered pattern with respect to the use of financial markets. Men tend to rely more on formal banks (39.2%) than do women (20.5%). Compared to men (16.4%), more women prefer ROSCAs (33.2%). On average, we found that about 27% of the respondents, regardless of their gender, kept their savings at home and about 11% deposited their savings in semiformal rural savings banks. Gender differences in the access to formal banks is also reflected in the possession of bank cards (debit, credit, or both)—men (57.9%) seem to use plastic money more than women do (33.6%). When credit is needed, women, and to a lesser extent men, borrow from relatives (45% vs. 37.4%), but other common options include accessing formal financial markets for men (20.5%) and ROSCAs for women (14.4%).

Participation in ROSCAs

At the time of the survey, 29.24% of men (50 observations) and 52.84% of women (121 observations) belonged to an active ROSCA. Men's average current contribution in each collection cycle of the ROSCA was about 510MXP,¹⁶ an amount substantially greater than women's contribution.¹⁷ Actual contributions can differ substantially among ROSCAs. In all cases, between 88% of women and 94% of men tend to make their ROSCA monetary contributions on a weekly and biweekly basis.

Most ROSCAs in which men were involved were male dominated, having on average six men, four women and 0.5 couples. For women, the average ROSCA consisted of eight women, 3.5 men and 0.5 couples. It follows that participants tend to

join ROSCAs where most of the other participants are of the same gender as the person joining.

Motivation for Participation

The main reason both men and women participate in a ROSCA is to save money (29.8% vs. 35.8%). Other relevant motives include joining as a precaution against unforeseen needs (12.3% for men vs. 18.3% for women), to repay debts (18.7% vs. 11.4%), and to finance domestic or small business projects (18.7% vs. 14%).

The use of the resources accumulated in ROSCAs is gender biased too. Men used the savings mainly to pay debts (29.2%), personal expenses (21.6%), and household expenses (15.8%). Women devoted the "pot" to financing children's needs (24%), household expenses (20.5%), and personal expenses (19.2%). According to the results, women seem to be more risk averse than men by saving to mitigate unexpected expenses and devoting resources to their children and household expenses.

Receiving the "Pot"

An important feature of ROSCAs is how "shifts"—the order in which members will receive the "pot"—are established. A significant number of men (43.9%) and women (36.2%) reported that the shift is set by random outcome, and less frequently determined by an agreement among all members (17% vs. 26.6%). It may also be set by the organizer (both around 18.5%) or by seniority (both around 14.5%).

Despite established shifts, ROSCAs tend to be quite flexible in case of sudden needs. When unforeseen events occur, a participant can switch his or her shift with some other member in most situations—between 75% and 80% of cases.

Trust Among ROSCA Members

Trust among ROSCA members, especially in rural areas, is essential for the success of the ROSCA model. To explore this idea, we asked survey respondents about what they needed to know to decide whether or not to participate in a ROSCA.

Most men (49.7%) and women (42.8%) responded that they needed only to know that the

organizer was responsible enough to gather people who could be trusted and would cover the payment in case of default. As a second response, men indicated that they needed to know the organizer and some participants (32.8%), while women (29.7%) said they needed to know all the members. During the three years preceding the survey, for both genders, in most cases, the ROSCA organizer was a woman (according to 58.5% of male respondents and 77.3% of females).

In evaluating other members of the ROSCA, on a scale of 0 ("no trust at all") to 10 ("absolute trust"), men scored an average of 7.6 (standard error: 1.89) and women scored an average of 8.3 (standard error: 1.83). This suggests that while men did not evaluate other members' trustworthiness poorly, they themselves turned out to be less trustworthy. Both genders showed high trust in the organizer: 9.17 for men (standard error: 1.04) and 9.56 for women (standard error: 0.80).

Repayment of Debt

An important aspect related to the role played by women in credit markets is debt fulfillment. Microfinance literature based mostly on case studies reports that women repay their debts more often than men do. On a scale from 0 ("failing continuously") to 10 ("never failing"), the surveyed men and women rated women as the most creditworthy gender. When respondents were asked if they had ever delayed or failed to make a payment when participating in a ROSCA, fewer women (57.9%) reported delay/failure to pay compared to men (74.7%). When any delay or failure to pay on the agreed date occurred, both genders pointed out that this was because they ran out of money (men 18.7% vs. women 13.5%).

Trust Between Genders

Respondents were asked how much they trusted men and women. The scale of assessment varied between 0 ("no trust at all") to 10 ("absolute trust"). The results are interesting: both men and women rely more on women—in favor of women, 7.19 (men) and 7.61 (women); in favor of men, 6.30 (men), 5.74 (women).

Conclusion

Given the descriptive nature of the survey statistics presented in this paper, the conclusions that can be drawn are at best tentative. To better understand the phenomenon of women dominating ROSCAs, inferential statistics need to be used. However, despite limitations, the ideas presented here can serve as the basis for further research on this topic.

While numerous studies have suggested that women tend to be the dominant players in ROSCAs,¹⁸ we propose that the reasons for the women's participation in ROSCAs may be broadly classified into two categories: gender differences in socio-economic conditions and higher levels of trust between women.

Scholars working with women have acknowledged that rural women in Mexico are more disadvantaged than men. The social position of women as a result of their disadvantages limits their ability to organize movements and inhibits their empowerment, probably because of their economic dependence.¹⁹ Because research has revealed that women as a group are excluded from formal financial markets, joining ROSCAs may provide them their only opportunity to mitigate their household income disadvantage. Perhaps these organizations also provide women an avenue to interact and bond with each other and to create social networks with individuals from similar backgrounds. Thus, ROSCAs may help create social capital for women who otherwise have little of it.

The higher rate of success of women compared to men in improving their household incomes through the use of microcredit is well documented by the Grameen Bank and other similar organizations in Bangladesh²⁰ and India.²¹ Women's dominance in ROSCAs has to be understood in conjunction with the exclusion of men from such associations. The general perception that men are less reliable in meeting their commitments to the ROSCA encourages their exclusion and, consequently, the increased proportion of women in ROSCAs.

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ENDNOTES

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- 2 Buvinić, 1997.
- 3 United Nations Development Programme, 2007:45.
- 4 Raccanello, Anand, and Bielma Dolores, 2008:156.
- 5 Zeller and Sharma, 1998.
- 6 Ardener, 1964; Low, 1995.
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- 8 Lwoga et al., 1999.
- 9 Ardener and Burman, 1995; Aryeetey, 1995.
- 10 Bouman, 1977; Robison and Siles, 1998.
- 11 Rutherford, 1997.
- 12 Ardener and Burman, 1995; Tsai, 1998; Verhoef, 2001; Anderson and Baland, 2002.
- 13 Lwoga et al., 1999.
- 14 Berenbach and Guzmán, 1994; Nelson, 1995.
- 15 Burman and Lembete, 1995.
- 16 Standard error: 698.61.
- 17 About 326MXP; standard error: 279.28.
- 18 Ardener and Burman, 1995; Tsai, 1998; Lwoga et al., 1999; Verhoef, 2001; Anderson and Baland, 2002.
- 19 Urquieta-Salomon, Tepichin-Valle, and Tellez-Rojos, 2009:28-29.
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THE CHINESE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT WAS INITIATED NOT BY WOMEN BUT BY ELITE MEN IN THE EARLY-20TH-CENTURY SOCIALIST MOVEMENT. This meant that leadership positions were reserved for men, and the power to change gender inequality was contingent on the political will of the state. As China opened-up and reformed its economic and social policies in the late 20th century, however, feminism in China shifted from state policy to a newfound collective awareness and independence on the part of women. In this era of globalization, the women's movement in China is slowly but surely moving toward active participation in and contribution to the global women's movement.

The Chinese Women's Movement: From State Control to Independent Global Participation

DR. YINGYI MA

Introduction

From the very start, the Chinese women's movement has been unique. Historically, the initiators of the Chinese women's movement were not women but elite male members of the socialist movement. Based on this, many scholars regard the Chinese women's movement as particular, unique, and as such, not global.¹ Nevertheless, since the reform and opening-up of the Chinese economy and society in the last quarter of the 20th century, the Chinese women's movement has been transformed. It is now a women-lead, independent movement with an increasing international presence. This article examines the historical background of the Chinese women's movement and how it changed during the reform period. It also discusses how, in this era of globalization in which China is increasingly a major player, the Chinese women's movement is taking its place as a part of the global women's movement.

Early 20th Century

The origin of Chinese women's oppression can be traced to three components of the philosophy of "filial piety" of Confucius: women must obey men, citizens must obey their ruler and the young must obey the elderly. Confucian philosophy helped maintain the patriarchal social order in China for thousands of years. It led to such infamous brutal practices as foot-binding young women in China. It started around the 10th century when the emperor was fascinated by the small feet of a dancer. The practice deformed women's feet and ultimately confined women to the home and made them

dependent on men.² The practice was not ended until the early 20th century, during the May Fourth Movement in 1919, when women's liberation was raised for the first time as part of the modernization effort to transform the old feudal China.³ The leaders and the majority of the participants of the May Fourth Movement were elite men who desired to modernize Chinese society. Only a minority of elite women participated in this movement.

Like women's movements in other developing countries from the early to mid-20th century, the Chinese women's movement developed in a different context from movements in more advanced western societies. The western women's movement arose within an existing cultural context of modernity, while women's movements in developing countries arose in tandem with the modernization of society.⁴ This directly affected the goals of women's movements in developing countries, including China, where women's liberation is tied to national and economic development. This difference also led women in the developing world to attribute their oppression not entirely, or even primarily, to gender alone.⁵ This enabled the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to tie women's interests with class interests and put the struggle for gender equality in the broad context of class equality. Although one could argue that the CCP appropriated Chinese women's interests to advance its own political agenda, regardless of the motivation of the CCP in promoting gender equality, Chinese women's acquiescence legitimized the CCP's merging of the gender and class struggles.

Communist Party State

The CCP was founded in 1921, and many of its leaders were members of and deeply affected by the 1919 May Fourth Movement and its feminist ideals. They subscribed to the belief that women's liberation and equality with men were essential to the construction of the new modern China at a time when China was beleaguered by warlords and invading imperialists.

Male advocacy of women's issues paradoxically created a patriarchal gender structure within the CCP that the party claimed to break away from—where men were the majority of the leaders and dominated the discourse on women's liberation issues and women were relegated to a marginal and secondary status. After the CCP took over power in China and established the communist party state in 1949, this gender structure largely remained intact. Christina Gilmartin, a specialist on modern Chinese history, contends that some of the essential features of women's relationship with the communist state in China were fashioned during the early formative years of the CCP in the early 20th century.⁶ Historian Tani Barlow also argues that “the contemporary Chinese women's movement is autonomous by default and only in relation to the state.”⁷

The Chinese women's movement has transformed what international feminists think about the relationship between the state and women's movements. Western feminist theory sees the state as fundamentally patriarchal, or, as American feminist Catharine MacKinnon puts it, “the state is male.”⁸ This description is evident in the CCP party state where the state leadership is overwhelmingly male. However, unlike in western countries where state action to support gender equality has come only as the result of the political mobilization of feminist groups,⁹ Chinese feminism was adopted as a state policy without advocacy from feminist groups. Under socialist construction in China, women gained property rights through state-sanctioned land reform and obtained independence within the family through marriage law.¹⁰

The state also mobilized rural and urban women into the public sphere of work, although

this benefited rural women and urban women to different extents.¹¹ Urban women working in state enterprises received various kinds of protection and subsidies from the state. For example, working urban women sent their children to child-care centers provided by their work unit. In addition, women were encouraged to make inroads into almost every occupation, and they received pay equal to their male counterparts.¹² In the countryside, the rural people did not have the same access to state protection and subsidies as their urban counterparts. The state also moved rural women from unpaid household work to socially recognized collective production, but they were paid less than men for the same work. As a result, the social perception that women have equal rights with men took root in urban but not rural areas.¹³

However, during this process of integration into the public workplace, women were largely passive. Without access to leadership positions of state institutions, women's power to change gender inequality would remain contingent upon the political will of the state. This became evident during the post-1978 reform era, when the party state withdrew its commitment to gender issues and shifted its priorities to developing a market-based economy.

Reform Era

In the late 1970s, the CCP initiated the reform and opening-up policies that have connected Chinese society with the international community and transformed the planned Chinese economy to a market economy. The government emphasizes economic development and efficiency over its earlier commitment to gender equality. As a result, women often bear the brunt of free market competition and are more likely to get laid off from state-owned enterprises. Young Chinese women also experience overt discrimination in the job market where employers often prefer to hire men under the pretext they won't take leave for childbirth or child-raising responsibilities.¹⁴ Hence, Chinese women have lost the protection that strong state control used to provide.

On the other hand, in the absence of state

protection also comes opportunity and freedom. Some urban women who were laid off during the reform of the economic system started their own businesses and for the first time became women entrepreneurs. Many rural women also welcome the reform, which allows them to leave the farm for temporary work in the city. Many rural women, for the first time in their lives, earn independent livings and sometimes earn more than their male family members. Social anthropologist Ellen Judd has argued that Chinese rural women especially welcome “the opportunity it brings to break through the entrenched androcentrism of rural communities.”¹⁵

The newly-found independence from the state and some of the newly-created resources that have resulted from the reform have helped Chinese women gain a sense of control over their own lives. This has contributed to the growth of a collective awareness and a new sense of identity and empowerment among women. According to native Chinese scholar Li Xiaojiang, this collective identity of Chinese women, which did not exist earlier during the course of the women's movement in Chinese history, is vital to a sustainable and lasting women's movement. Collective awareness and identity are the key elements for successful women's organizing.¹⁶

Women's Organizations

Since the CCP founded the socialist state, the Chinese women's movement has only been officially organized through women's federations and trade unions. The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), set up in 1949 right after the Communist Party took power, is the largest national women's organization to mobilize and represent women. It stands as the intermediary organization between the state and women. It has branches at every level of government—national, provincial, city, county and village. Over the years, ACWF has been the main voice for Chinese women. However, as the only official women's organization, it is expected to subsume sometimes conflicting interests: the gender interests of the women it represents and the class interests of the state.¹⁷

Although organizing outside the sanction of the

state has been politically suspect, raising questions about whether the activities are compatible with socialist principles, in the 1990s, the party relaxed its control over women's organizations to some degree. Unofficial women's associations now form and develop in the cities. Their members are often from privileged strata of society, such as women intellectuals, artists, and business entrepreneurs. They organize to build collective awareness as well as to network.¹⁸ Sometimes women organize themselves based on shared geographical and cultural backgrounds. For example, rural migrant women working in urban areas may set up their own unofficial organizations where they share with one another their working experiences and support each other while living away from home. In some places, they also sponsor the magazine titled “Rural Women,”¹⁹ which serves not only rural migrant women but also the large rural women's community.

Connecting with the Global Community

China's reform and opening-up policies have transformed the country from closed and isolated to open and lively, with expanded contacts with the global community. The women's movement is no exception.

China's hosting of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 was a major boost to the women's movement in China. Official sponsorship of the Conference and the associated public mobilization for women's participation heightened public interest in women's issues, a sharp contrast to the state's withdrawal from women's causes in previous years.

The Conference resulted in a surge in the establishment of women's studies centers in universities. From September 1993 to May 1995, 18 women's studies centers were added to the original five, with another 13 established by December 1999.²⁰ In the 1990s, women's issues were studied and strongly advocated by women themselves, a change from earlier times when research on women was largely promoted by male scholars. Academic exchanges and, in particular, academic conferences attended by both Chinese native researchers on women's

issues and international scholars, have enhanced the connection of Chinese intellectuals with the outside world and enriched the discourse on women's issues within China. This has also contributed to more freedom for Chinese women to talk about their issues. For example, new research on women's reproductive health has touched on the very sensitive issue of China's family planning policy. Research and discussions nowadays on these issues can extend beyond the parameters set by the state, albeit cautiously.²¹

The expanded international contacts have also resulted in increased support from outside China for women's issues. For example, over the five years from 1991–1995, the Ford Foundation supported about 40 projects with \$6 million to \$7 million for women's programs and groups, including ACWF.²² The Ford Foundation offered not only financial resources but also discourse on women's issues. For example, the definition ACWF adopted for women's reproductive health came from the Ford Foundation. In another example, the multiyear Developing China's Women/Gender Studies Project started in 2000 and funded by the Ford Foundation (led by Du Fangqin, a feminist scholar in mainland China, and Wang Zheng, a diasporic scholar in the U.S.) works on discipline building for women's studies in China.²³

Conclusion

The historical uniqueness of the Chinese women's movement always challenges western feminist thinking about women's movements. Nevertheless, in this era of globalization, the Chinese women's movement has been increasingly influenced by ideas and actions of western women's movements. As the Chinese women's movement continues to undergo subtle but significant changes, it is moving slowly but surely toward active participation in and contribution to the global women's movement.

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- 1 Peters and Wolper, 1995.
- 2 Stacy, 1983.
- 3 Lu and Zhen 1990.
- 4 Farganis, 1987.
- 5 Johnson-Odim, 1991:316.
- 6 Gilmartin, 1995.
- 7 Barlow, 2001.
- 8 MacKinnon, 1982.
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- 15 Judd, 2002: 194.
- 16 Li, 1996.
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- 20 Chow, 2004.
- 21 Zhang, 1996.
- 22 Ibid.
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PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2010 OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES THAT WILL TAKE PLACE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA, have engendered opposition in the form of the “No to 2010” movement, which is being led by Indigenous women. The movement seeks to stop the destruction of Indigenous people’s homelands, the displacement and criminalization of the urban poor, and the shifting of public funds from social programs to Olympics development projects. The “No to 2010” movement has provided an opportunity for diverse groups of women and Indigenous communities to come together, both locally and globally, to mobilize for change.

The Emergence of a New Global Movement: Women's Opposition to the 2010 Winter Olympics

DR. J. SHANTZ

Introduction

The February 2010 Vancouver-Whistler Olympic Winter Games are scheduled to take place on Native lands never given up by Indigenous communities in British Columbia (BC), Canada. For growing numbers of Indigenous women, anti-poverty activists, homeless women, shelter advocates, low-income tenants and sex workers, the Olympic Games represent a continued history of colonization and "social cleansing" of poor communities. The construction of infrastructure for the 2010 Olympics is adding to extensive destruction of Indigenous peoples' traditional homelands and contributing to the displacement and increased criminalization of people living in poor urban neighborhoods.

Women, especially Indigenous women, play central roles at the grassroots, national, and international levels in the "No to 2010" anti-Olympics movement. This transnational women's movement challenges global institutions such as the International Olympics Committee and the impact those global bodies have on diverse, often marginalized, local communities in different parts of the world. Focal points include sexual exploitation, criminalization of marginalized women, and lack of funding for social programs, all of which have been exacerbated by shifts in government social policy and resources in favor of the Olympics. Women from diverse backgrounds have joined together to organize and raise awareness surrounding these issues.

Locally, anti-Olympics organizing has brought together women involved in campaigns to defend

sex trade workers against criminalization and abuse, in housing rights groups, in anti-poverty movements, and in Indigenous rights struggles, with a breadth and depth of alliance that had not developed before the Olympics announcement. The growing anti-Olympics movement brings together a range of issues often under-emphasized within the Olympic context from the margins to the mainstream.

The "No to 2010" movement sees the Olympics as a multinational industry that engages in, and profits from, a massive transfer of public wealth and services away from social programs and necessities for poor and working-class communities toward projects that benefit corporations, political elites, and a global tourist class. The movement's ultimate goal would be the cancellation of the 2010 Olympics and the transfer of the money, time, resources and labor from Olympics development to essential social policy concerns such as housing, childcare and protecting Indigenous cultural and property rights. Failing that, the movement hopes to use the opportunity provided by the Olympics to raise awareness about the movement's concerns and the inadequate distribution of social resources.

Indigenous Women's Involvement

To understand the significance of Indigenous women's involvement in the "No to 2010" movement, it is important to look at the structuring of women's status set forth in the Indian Act, the government policy that governs and regulates Indigenous people's lives within

Canada.¹ The Indian Act took away Indigenous women's status as Indigenous people and removed their right to live in their home communities if they married a non-Indigenous man or a man from outside their communities. The Indian Act served to uproot tens of thousands of Indigenous women, threatening their social ties to families and communities. In addition, through the Indian Act, the Canadian government established and maintains a system of governance and land tenure that replaced community tribal councils. Tribal councils often included full participation of women, while government-approved band councils tend to be male-dominated.² Contemporary Indigenous activists view the preparations for the 2010 Olympics as extending these policies to further strip land and resources from Indigenous communities and render their cultures even more precarious. Thus, tourism and economic development have become synonymous with displacement and dislocation.

One of the horrible legacies of the Indian Act and the decimation of Indigenous cultures is that Indigenous women, who were respected and honored in their own societies, have become marginalized. As Daphne Bramham notes: "Not only do they have fewer rights and less power than aboriginal men, they have fewer rights than any other Canadian women."³ The very definition of Indian status, a government-created designation that serves to divide Indigenous communities, has tied women's identity to the status of their husbands. Neither the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including its equality provisions, nor provincial matrimonial property laws apply on reserves.⁴ Thus, Indigenous women's leadership of the "No to 2010" Olympics movement has allowed them to reclaim some their traditional status.

Indigenous women in the "No to 2010" community have mobilized to argue that the "people of the land" should operate under international law. They are currently preparing a case to present to the Organization of American States (OAS), the regional body that brings together nations of the Americas around multilateral issues

of trade, development and rights. The complaint to be filed with the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights pertains to the forcible removal of an aboriginal woman's children by BC's Ministry of Child and Family Services. The women hope that the outcome of this case will establish that neither the Canadian nor the BC government has the legal authority to take actions that infringe on aboriginal sovereignty, whether in family matters or in Olympic developments. Thus, opposition to the Olympics has spurred activity around broader issues of concern and contributed to the development of innovative approaches to these issues.

Groups of Indigenous women across generations have been drawn to assert or re-assert their positions as community leaders and spokespeople against decision-making processes that seek to exclude them. Pacheedaht Elder Harriet Nahanee one of the earliest opponents of the 2010 Games and its effects on ecosystems and habitat, has worked tirelessly to mobilize young women to oppose the expansion of the Sea-to-Sky Highway link between Vancouver and Whistler due to its destruction of wetlands, woods and other territories essential for the collection of traditional medicines. For Harriet, the land needed to be protected for its own sake and respected as a giver of life.⁵

The inspiration of her struggle and sacrifice has served as a rallying point for many young women within the Native Youth Movement (NYM).⁶ These young women have been at the forefront of organizing alliances among women from diverse groups, including homeless women, sex trade workers, environmentalists and housing advocates to develop the current multifaceted opposition to the 2010 Games.

Kanahus Pelkey is a Secwepemc and Ktnuxa Warrior and a spokesperson for the Secwepemc chapter of the NYM. Jailed for fighting against the illegal occupation and theft of Secwepemc Lands for the Sun Peaks ski-resort, and active in opposing the 2010 Olympics, Pelkey explains that NYM is opposing the Olympics not only because of unresolved land claims but also due

to the threat the Olympics poses to the local land and low-income communities in the city.⁷ By participating in the "No to 2010" movement, Indigenous women have re-asserted their positions in community leadership and participation in defiance of the patriarchal governance imposed by the Indian Act.

Sex Work and Violence

Spectacular events such as the Olympics, which draw hundreds of thousands of male tourists with disposable income and the cover of anonymity, contribute to large increases in prostitution and trafficking of women. In Seoul in 1988, there was increased prostitution for the Games.⁸ During the Athens Games of 2004, 40,000 prostitutes were brought in from Asian countries and elsewhere.⁹ This trafficking is carried out by networks that subject women to abuse, torture and identity theft. The Vancouver Police Department expects the same to happen for the 2010 Olympics.¹⁰ As opponents of the 2010 Games note, this is particularly troubling given the recent history of violence against women, including the abductions and murders of sex workers, in Vancouver over the last decade. More than 68 women are missing and/or murdered in Vancouver alone.¹¹ Many were Native, and many were reportedly involved in the sex trade.¹²

Protecting Indigenous sex workers is a focal point of the "No to 2010" movement. The Aboriginal Women's Action Network has spoken against the manner in which Indigenous women's issues have been ignored as the government shifts resources from social programs to Olympic development. They are mobilizing to implore governments in BC and Vancouver to pay attention to the voices of Aboriginal women and women's groups in the public discussions on the 2010 Olympics. They have been particularly concerned with the trafficking of women and violence against women working in the sex trade,¹³ arguing that rather than diverting social funding towards Olympic developments and the policing of poor women and sex trade workers in

areas near Olympic venues, public funding should be directed toward social programs and services, support for Indigenous women and children, and ending forced prostitution.

Opponents of the 2010 Olympics are concerned that the Games will only increase violence against women. This is especially likely given that, as part of economic restructuring to fund the Olympics, the provincial government has cut funding for social programs, housing, and healthcare programs on which poor and homeless women and sex trade workers rely.¹⁴ Government expenditures on the Games will total approximately \$6 billion, which will be paid for through public debt.¹⁵ At the same time, the provincial housing budget for 2009 was cut by \$70 million.

Sex trade workers in Vancouver's poorest neighborhoods have mobilized as part of the opposition to the Olympics, organizing mass demonstrations to protest police sweeps and the ticketing of sex trade workers. As part of a grassroots response to Olympics-driven state initiatives punishing sex trade workers, sex trade workers have attempted to establish alternative sex trade practices, such as a worker-controlled, cooperatively-run brothels¹⁶ that would provide women a safe place to work, with health and safety rules and freedom from the exploitation of pimps.

Because the Olympics' organizing committee's mandate promised support for local economic development, brothel backers have proposed that the cooperative should be included alongside other projects. Yet the government and Olympics representatives refuse to support, or even engage with brothel backers, exposing the difficulties marginalized and exploited women face in accessing the Olympics social development process.

Homelessness

The number of Indigenous women living in predominantly non-Indigenous towns and cities in Canada has grown steadily, largely as a result of the uprooting of women and children and displacement of Indigenous communities over decades.¹⁷ Increasingly more and more of these

Indigenous women are becoming victims of economic instability and homelessness in urban centers.

On average, Indigenous women in Canadian urban centers are unable to earn enough money to meet their own needs, much less support a family. In the 1996 census, the average annual income of Indigenous women living off-reservation was \$5,500 less than that of non-Indigenous women and substantially less than the amount Statistics Canada estimated people living in a large Canadian city would need to provide food, shelter and clothing for themselves.¹⁸ While women have advocated for Olympics development and planning to include affordable housing initiatives, the Canadian government nor the Vancouver Organizing Committee have yet to take any action. In fact, early in 2009, it was revealed that 250 units of social housing promised as part of the Olympics bid face termination due to cost overruns.¹⁹ An affordable housing project slated for Whistler as part of the bid has also been cancelled. As with the co-op brothel proposal, these moves suggest that economic development for the poor and marginalized has found no home within the official Olympics plans.

Since winning the 2010 Winter Games in 2003, Vancouver has lost more than 850 units of low-income housing, while during the same period, the number of homeless has increased from 1,000 to more than 2,500.²⁰ Closures have been driven by the Olympics as developers seek to create more high-end, and high profit, spaces for tourists and corporate investors. In Vancouver, anticipation of the 2010 Olympics has led to rent increases and the transformation of low-income housing into upscale condos. For the urban poor of Vancouver, the 2010 Games' planning has already resulted in hundreds evicted from low-income housing.

In response, the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre and the Anti-Poverty Committee of Vancouver have organized, through direct action and legal means, to stop evictions of residents of hostels and single-room occupancy hotels. They have also supported efforts of squatters to take over abandoned buildings for use as housing.²¹

Criminalization of Activism

As many as 13,000 police and military personnel are set to patrol the Games and demonstrations, the largest single Games-related operating expense.²² Aggressive policing has already been directed against anti-poverty and housing groups, environmentalists, and Natives in Vancouver. Officers have also targeted immigrants. No One Is Illegal (NOII), an immigrant and refugee defense group, has worked to connect the diverse groups targeted for criminalization and opposition to the Olympics. NOII organizer Harsha Walia has been at the forefront of the "No to 2010" movement, organizing against police surveillance, security apparatus, and border controls. In her view, Olympics opposition groups must work against the nationalism that influences much political discourse in Canada and which is stoked by Olympic pride, while respecting the fact that the Games will be held on un-surrendered Indigenous lands.

Indigenous women have been particularly targeted by the state for punishment. Pacheedaht Elder Harriet Nahanee was arrested and sentenced to 14 days in jail by the Supreme Court of British Columbia because of her role in blocking the expansion of the Sea-to-Sky Highway, which destroyed the area of Eagleridge Bluffs for the 2010 Olympics. In February 2007, 73-year-old Harriet died from health complications arising from her imprisonment.²³

Homeless women and women involved in the sex trade have filed a Human Rights complaint against the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association and the Civil City Commissioner. The complaint alleges systemic discrimination on the basis of tickets targeting poor people.²⁴

Internationalization of the Movement

In addition to day-to-day "No to 2010" local organizing, women have been active in taking the message of their numerous concerns to communities outside of Vancouver and British Columbia. This work has included national and international

speaking tours and coalition building. These efforts have been geared towards building an international movement that is able to raise dissent against Olympic sponsors and pro-Olympic politicians in a variety of jurisdictions. In October 2007, more than 1,500 Indigenous people representing communities across the western hemisphere held the Gathering of the Indigenous Peoples of America in Mexico.²⁵ They stated in their final declaration: "We reject the 2010 Winter Olympics on sacred and stolen territory of Turtle Island—Vancouver, Canada."²⁶ In addition, delegates called upon Indigenous people to travel to Vancouver for the massive demonstrations that are planned for February 2010 in opposition to the Olympics.

Women in BC have also communicated with networks of activists in England and Russia who are concerned about the impacts of the 2012 London Games and the 2014 Games in Sochi, Russia. The "No to 2010" movement also situates itself as part of an emerging global movement against destructive development projects that serve to displace Indigenous communities from their lands.²⁷ This process has been especially disastrous for Canadian Indigenous women, exacerbated by their diminished status under the Indian Act, which deprives them of full standing and rights to property and decision-making.

Conclusion

Even if the growing "No to 2010" movement fails to prevent the Olympics from taking place (an admittedly monumental task), it has already served to empower Indigenous, poor, and working-class women. It has also provided an organizational model in which women of varied backgrounds can effectively unite around issues and build relationships bridging diverse experiences. Opposition to the Olympics has brought women together at the intersections of women's oppression, poverty, colonialism, globalization and neo-liberalism to contest Olympics-driven development and changes in government policy and funding. Olympics opposition has also provided an opportunity for women working within a variety of movements

to come together to forge and strengthen alliances that had not previously existed. They have used the "No to 2010" organizing as an opportunity to raise awareness about their situation, educate themselves and others, and mobilize for change.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Amnesty International, 2004: 3-4.
- 2 Carol Thevarge, a holistic healer by trade whose parents are of N'Quatqua and Lil'wat heritage, has organized to publicly raise the connections between the Indian Act, aboriginal rights and title, and the 2010 Olympics. Thevarge argues that Native people have never ceded, by treaty or other means, rights and title to their traditional territory. Further, in her view, no band constituted by the Canadian government under the Indian Act has the right to act on their behalf. The male-dominated character of band councils is a well known fact of Indigenous experience in Canada. See Barker (2006) and Lawrence (2008).
- 3 Bramham, 2008.
- 4 See the Indian Act, <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/aboriginaldocs/m-stat.htm>; the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/charter/index.html>; and the Family Relations Act of British Columbia, http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/freeside/--%20F%20--/Family%20Relations%20Act%20%20RSBC%201996%20%20c.%20128/00_96128_01.xml.
- 5 For more information about this action and the jailing of Harriet Nahanee, as well as her influence on others, see Mare, 2007. See also the tribute website Spirit of Warrior Harriet Nahanee. <http://harriet-spirit.blogspot.com/>. For some of Harriet's own words see Nahanee, 1995.
- 6 For information about the NYM see <http://www.turtleisland.org/news/news-aboriginalrights-nym.htm>. See also http://mostlywater.org/native_youth_movement_warriors_targeted_arrested_at_anti_olympic_protest.
- 7 Bick, 2008.
- 8 Lenskyj, 2000.
- 9 No2010, 2008a.
- 10 See Leung, 2007.
- 11 See Leung, 2007. Bronskill and Bailey, 2005.
- 12 Amnesty International, 2004: 23. A Joint Taskforce of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Vancouver Police Department investigating the disappearances reports that at least 16 of the missing women are Indigenous, a number that greatly exceeds the proportion of indigenous women living in Vancouver.
- 13 For information about AWAN see Huntley, 2000. More information about AWAN can be found at the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres. <http://www.casac.ca/english/awan.htm>.
- 14 For overviews of recent budgets see the Canadian Centre for Policy alternatives, 2009 and MacLeod, 2009.

- 15 Bramham, 2009.
- 16 Leung, 2007. The co-op planning group developed out of a pre-existing Vancouver-based sex workers' alliance, the British Columbia Coalition of Experiential Women.
- 17 Amnesty International, 2004.
- 18 Amnesty International, 2004: 19.
- 19 See CBC, 2009.
- 20 PIVOT Legal Society, 2006.
- 21 For information about squatting in Vancouver see Vidaver, 2003/2004. More about DEWC at <http://www.streamsofjustice.org/2009/05/rd-annual-womens-housing-march.html>. More about the APC at www.apc.org.
- 22 Akin, 2008.
- 23 Paulsen, 2007.
- 24 See Lupick 2008a and 2008b.
- 25 No2010, 2008b.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 This movement includes the Zapatistas and the newly established camps in Cocapah and Mayan Territory. It also includes the 13 Native Nations fighting against sewage being made into snow on San Francisco Peaks in Arizona, the Dineh Elders fighting a power plant in New Mexico, Lakota and Ponca warriors and the many Nations who are Uniting to Protect Bear Butte in South Dakota, the Annicinabe fighting logging in Grassy Narrows, Ontario, the Pitt River People fighting for Medicine Lake, California, the Thaltan of British Columbia and the Mayan of Guatemala and Mexico fighting mining and the people of Six Nations in Ontario, fighting an exclusive housing development. It also includes the Mapuche in Argentina and the Kuna in Panama.

BY ADOPTING THE GOALS AND TENETS OF A TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL MOVEMENT OPPOSING THE INJUSTICES OF CAPITALISM AND GLOBALIZATION, a union of Brazilian women – originally formed to fight violence against women – has shifted its focus from local gender issues to international political concerns. This shift from addressing the specific needs of women to focusing on other sets of priorities has also challenged the group’s identity as a part of the greater women’s movement.

Identity Crisis: Integrating a Brazilian Women's Union in a Global Political Movement

ABBY GONDEK

Introduction

The *União das Mulheres Cearenses* (UMC) or Union of Cearense Women in the state of Ceará, Brazil, seems to be having an identity crisis. The majority of its members advocates the goals of the group *Crítica Radical* (CR) or Radical Criticism, an anti-capitalist and male-dominated group with roots in Germany that emphasizes the “greater fight” to end the capitalist system. Yet, the UMC continues to serve and advocate for women, demonstrating the difficulty women's movements face in identifying and articulating a common goal from competing but compatible principles.

The experience of the UMC reveals that locally-based women's movements may find themselves in an “in-between” position when they embrace an international movement.¹ The UMC women profiled in this article clearly believe that gender equality will not achieve meaningful social transformation. Thus, should feminist ideas and practices be abandoned? There must be ways to redefine both feminism and anti-capitalism so that they are not considered mutually exclusive.

History of the UMC

Maria Luiza Fontenele, a former mayor in Fortaleza in the state of Ceará, Brazil, and one of the founders of the UMC, describes the organization's beginnings as follows:

We resolved to create this Union of Women [in 1979] because when we arrived, the people who participated the most in the

struggles were women: in neighborhood movements and against the dictatorship... we fought for the specific question that was violence against women, but also fought through the bigger questions.²

The UMC members bring a variety of activist experiences in student and housing movements, unions, and public health services to the group. The leaders of the movement are the women who have been around the longest. For the most part they are also whiter, wealthier, and work in “professional” fields such as politics, law, and health.³

Two of the founders—Esmeralda de Oliveira Queiróz and Maria Auxiliadora Barbosa—come from working-class backgrounds and would be considered “*morena*” (brown-skinned) based on Brazilian racial categorization. Queiróz is Fontenele's domestic worker. Barbosa lives in a land occupation and organizes a neighborhood women's group called “*As Abelhinhas*” (The Little Bees) that sells objects made of recycled materials. Neither of these women are decision-makers or spokeswomen for the UMC; “professional” activist women, like Fontenele, speak for them. The organization is not only characterized by two “classes” of membership but two competing ideologies.

Fontenele's use of the words “bigger questions” hints at the group's changing ideology and devaluation of their former focus on “the specific question.” Unlike a traditional, self-defined feminist organization that addresses women's intersecting and sometimes conflicting identities without believing

that some issues are “bigger” or “smaller,” the UMC is becoming increasingly intertwined with Radical Criticism, an anti-capitalist and male-dominated group with roots in Germany that emphasizes “the greater fight for human emancipation.” According to Fontenele, CR has existed in Fortaleza since 2000.⁴ The UMC’s mission statement, published in 2001, reveals CR’s influence:

[The UMC] seeks to combine the fight against oppression of women with an anti-capitalist perspective. Since its Eighth Congress, it has developed a radical criticism of the modern market-based, patriarchal society, stimulating feminine self-organization, supporting all forms of direct action against the market and the state. Known for its combativeness and intransigence in defense of its causes, the UMC is built on its base communities, organizing women in their homes as well as their places of work and study, strengthening a social consciousness for a world without oppressions or exploitations of any kind.⁵

Despite the assertion that the organization combines the fight against sexism and capitalism to combat oppressions and exploitations of all kinds, in practice, the UMC supports women while ideologically supporting and collaborating with CR’s anti-capitalist struggle.

UMC Women: Different Approaches

Class consciousness has always been a central part of the UMC’s organizing. Most of the members are involved in social movements advocating for education, health, and housing. Barbosa explains: “This movement does not discriminate against anyone, not the poor, not the rich; and I am poor.”⁶ She mentions land occupations, the elderly, women, and unemployment. She also discusses violence against women and *machismo*: “We want equality between men and women. We are destroying the man who is macho because we want a man who is for equality.”⁷ Barbosa understands that feminism fights

for the rights of women, the poor, unemployed, and elderly. She does not use the Radical Criticism terminology frequently employed by the majority of the UMC members, possibly because of her geographical and educational marginalization from the UMC leadership and headquarters.

Iraci Delfim, the coordinator of the *Sala de Apoio a Mulher* (Women’s Support Room), a legal service organized by the UMC that connects women lawyers with women who are separating from or divorcing their husbands or partners, is one of the UMC members who promotes the CR ideology. Delfim is involved in the movement for housing and lives in an urban land occupation. Like Auxiliadora, she declares her dedication to “breaking all forms of oppression, prejudice and *machismo*, everything that makes women submissive to men.”⁸ She shares Auxiliadora’s belief in the need to fight gender-based oppression, but she frames her analysis in CR terms: “There is a greater fight, one which will change the system, so that the entire way of being human will change. People will not be valued for what they produce, but who they are: liberation, not just equality. Human emancipation: this is a greater fight.”⁹ From Delfim’s perspective, feminism should be subsumed by anti-capitalist ideals in the pursuit of a common goal: human liberation.

In March 2007, Rosa Fonseca, a founder of the UMC, sociologist, educator, and former city councilwoman, stated: “We want to overcome the Union of Cearense Women.”¹⁰ She understands the feminist movement as proposing women’s independence through work, but in the end, to her, working women were just as subjugated to the logic of capital as men. From Fonseca’s point of view, the liberal feminist approach that posited women’s work as freedom has proven to be flawed. According to Andreh Jonathas, a journalist for the Brazilian multimedia blog, *Overmundo*, who interviewed Fonseca:

Rosa suggests a movement that is transnational, horizontal (without direction or base), in a network, combating the essence of capitalism, that is the patriarchy of value. It isn’t a union, a party, an

ecological movement, or even feminism; it is an attempt to overcome a model that suffocates.

This perspective, instead of seeing the possibilities within a materialist feminist analysis, disregards the entire feminist endeavor in favor of an anti-capitalist campaign. A materialist feminist standpoint acknowledges “the integral function of patriarchal structures in the smooth operation of capital accumulation.”¹¹ UMC members do not argue that women’s labor is “the primary source of capital accumulation” or that women provide “one of the main sources of cheap labor in waged work,” statements that would be central to a materialist feminist perspective.¹² Perhaps UMC members are not aware of ideologies or organizations that demonstrate how feminism and anti-capitalism are connected, and so anti-capitalism is favored because the UMC perceives feminism as failed ideology.

Influence of Radical Criticism

The UMC relies on the economic theories of two German philosophers, Robert Kurz and Roswitha Scholz. They were once writers for the German publication, *Krisis*, but split in 2004 to form the theoretical magazine, *Exit! Criticism and Crisis of the Market Society*. For Scholz, this split was caused by the failure of certain *Krisis* members to acknowledge “abstract work” as a “fundamentally masculine principle that walks hand-in-hand with asymmetrical sexual relations and masculine domination.”¹³ Scholz argues the “critique of value,” promoted by these *Krisis* contributors, “assumes universality, as is typical in masculine thinking in the West, and suggests that the critique is equally valid for everyone, male and female.”¹⁴

Interestingly, the CR vocabulary comes directly from *Krisis*. Although Kurz split from *Krisis* along with Scholz, he seems to share its inability to consider gender as a central component of the capitalist machine. Kurz implies that the feminist movement no longer addresses the needs of women or men and that to achieve emancipation they must go beyond the feminist movement. He positions capitalism as

the root of the problem of unequal gender relations; according to his logic, opposing capitalism must be the primary focus for feminists.¹⁵

Many members of the UMC who have become involved with CR voice Kurz’s theoretical arguments. Fontenele declares, “We want to declare war on the capitalist system that is a destructor, destroying nature, human beings and we want to build a new type of society.”¹⁶ Veronica Rodrigues, an activist in the church and housing movements as well as in the UMC, agrees: “We don’t want this fight for equality with men anymore. It is a greater fight, of justice, of equality, of everything, of emancipation, construction as subjects.”¹⁷ According to Iracy Delfim, we are “trying to analyze the system that puts women in this submissive situation: the state, the market, the politics. Inviting that fight, that flag, of the death of this system, combating the system that proposes the destruction of women, humanity and the planet.”¹⁸ The UMC members assert that women’s fight for equality with men will not solve the problem. They are advocating for the end of the capitalist system and the overthrow of the old feminism. They do not mention that sexism is also a root problem, that the capitalist system operates by employing the cheap labor of women. The class consciousness present at the founding of the UMC is now wrapped in vocabulary created by German economic philosophers.

The UMC has incorporated an explicitly anti-capitalist perspective utilizing CR terminology. This incorporation has led to a rhetorical devaluation of the “specific” concerns of women and a greater valuation of the “general” fight for “human emancipation.” The UMC does not recognize the underlying ideological compatibility of anti-capitalist and feminist perspectives.

Anti-Capitalism and Feminism

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, a theorist of transnational feminist anti-capitalism,¹⁹ argues that although “girls and women are central to the labor of global capital, antiglobalization work does not seem to draw on feminist analyses or strategies.” She further asserts that “feminists need to be anticapitalists,” and

“antiglobalization activists and theorists also need to be feminists.” She notes that gender is not “a basis for organizing in most of the antiglobalization movements.”²⁰ The UMC was formed because, as Maria Luiza Fontenele stated, “the people who participated the most in the struggles were women.” Mohanty argues that because “women are central to the life of neighborhoods and communities they assume leadership positions in these struggles,” and that it is “the lives, experiences, and struggles of girls and women of the Two-Thirds World that demystify capitalism in its racial and sexual dimensions—and that provide productive and necessary avenues of theorizing and enacting anti-capitalist resistance.”²¹ Thus, feminist goals should be anti-capitalist, and anti-capitalist objectives should be feminist.

There are feminist organizations that incorporate anti-capitalist positions and remain intersectional, such as the NextGENDERation Network. This European transnational network of students, researchers and activists is interested in the intersections between feminist theory and politics and anti-racist, migrant, lesbian, queer and anti-capitalist perspectives. The group discusses the challenges involved in incorporating “issues of gender, ethnicity, ‘race’ and sexuality” into the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist agendas because these issues are often marginalized or “considered only in terms of ‘effects’ of global economic processes.”²² This is what is happening with the UMC. Like Robert Kurz, UMC members see sexism as a side effect of capitalism and thus focus their energy on challenging capitalist theory and principles in dramatic ways to bring about the end of sexism and other forms of oppression. The NextGENDERation Network enacts a simultaneous critique of sexism, racism, heterosexism, capitalism and imperialism, without privileging one form of oppression over any other. In contrast, the UMC, through its interaction with Radical Criticism, privileges the anti-capitalist struggle as the “greater fight.”

UMC's Identity Crisis

UMC's ideological transformation from equality feminism to anti-capitalism is surprising

because of the observations of feminist scholars of Latin American women's movements. Sonia Alvarez examined the resistance feminists faced from mixed-gender leftist groups before and after the *abertura* (political opening) in São Paulo. These leftist groups felt feminist groups should mobilize around general political issues like overturning authoritarian rule instead of focusing specifically on women's oppression.²³ Women's groups moved away from these leftist groups, however, and formed autonomous organizations around issues such as “sexual and domestic violence and reproductive rights.”²⁴

Another scholar, Lynn Stephen, a leader in the *Movimento de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais* (MMTR) or Rural Women Worker's Movement in Rio Grande do Sul, explained how her women's organization became autonomous: “We started to talk about other issues like women's health, sexuality and our bodies that were not taken up by [the landless workers'] movements. There wasn't any room to discuss these issues.... They were always considered secondary.”²⁵ MMTR broke away from non-gender-specific groups because those groups did not give women the space to talk about issues like sexuality or reproductive health. Gender-specific concerns were considered “secondary” and thus less important than the issues addressed by the leftist groups.

Both Alvarez and Stephen describe women's groups' ideologies moving away from the “general” concerns of the political Left to focus on the “specific” concerns of women. But, in the UMC, the ideological shift went in the opposite direction because the UMC decided that focusing on gender equality would not address all the needs UMC members see in their communities.

Despite the theoretical shift, however, the UMC continues to provide legal services to women and advocate for women's political rights. Iracy Delfim explains: “Women who are abused — they feel like victims, they feel impotent. They need [legal services] to gain strength, to be able to confront, to be able to go on.”²⁶ On May 15, 2003, the UMC held a Mothers' Day Celebration for Women Victims of Domestic Violence. Maria Luiza Fontenele told the

audience about the electrocution of a female biology teacher by her husband:

The UMC is accompanying that fight. We wanted to make a demonstration there...we could make a revolution if we got together. When one woman is in trouble other women must go fight with her because only with unity will change happen. If all the women in the world got together, a huge transformation could occur.

Later, Fontenele asked all of the women in the auditorium to stand and link hands. She emphasized that "We can do this.," creating an atmosphere of enthusiasm, support, care, and understanding — a united and feminist space.

In February 2004, the UMC issued an alert decrying the possibility that a prisoner who murdered at least four women in Cariri, in the state of Ceará, was going to be released. The UMC condemned the brutality of violence against women and urged readers to write letters to the Federal Supreme Court to ensure the murderer remained in prison. The UMC included a piece of CR's philosophy: "We repeat: the atrocities of our day prove the urgency of the construction of a new society, a civilization of human emancipation!"²⁷

Conclusion

Although the goals of the Union of Cearense Women and of Radical Criticism appear to be compatible, the UMC does not treat them as equal in importance but instead seems to give precedence to the CR agenda. As a result, the UMC's identity is being subsumed by the large global anti-capitalism movement. However, if CR chose not to designate the "greater fight" as separate and distinct from gender-specific issues, the UMC would not have to split between anti-capitalism advocacy and advocacy for gender equality. Similarly, if the UMC chose a feminism that does not emphasize equality within the existing capitalist system but instead challenged capitalism's destructive nature, the UMC could integrate its multiple identities.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Anzaldúa, 1996.
- 2 Personal Interview with Maria Luiza Fontenele, April 15, 2003.
- 3 The research presented in this article is part of the author's capstone project of a semester in Northeastern Brazil with the School for International Training in 2003, and the quotations are from direct interviews with members of the UMC.
- 4 Statement of Maria Luiza Fontenele, May 14, 2003.
- 5 Third International Conference of People's Global Action, 2001.
- 6 Personal Interview with Maria Auxiliadora Barbosa, May 12, 2003.
- 7 Personal Interview with Maria Auxiliadora Barbosa, April 15, 2003.
- 8 Person Interview with Iracy Delfim, May 12, 2003.
- 9 Person Interview with Iracy Delfim, May 22, 2003.
- 10 Jonathas, 2007.
- 11 Hennessy and Ingraham, 1997: 6.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 1-2.
- 13 Scholz, 2002.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 Kurz, 2002.
- 16 Fontenele, April 15, 2003, interview.
- 17 Veronica Rodrigues in discussion with the author, April 15, 2003.
- 18 Delfim, April 15, 2003, interview.
- 19 Women's Studies at Syracuse University, “Chandra Talpade Mohanty.” http://womens-studies.syr.edu/C_Mohanty.htm.
- 20 Mohanty, 2003: 528-529.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 515.
- 22 NextGENDERation Network, 2004.
- 23 Alvarez, 1989: 41.
- 24 Alvarez, 1994: 47-48.
- 25 Stephen, 1997: 218.
- 26 Delfim, May 22, 2003, interview.
- 27 *Ibid.*

TRANSNATIONAL WOMEN'S ORGANIZING MAY INCLUDE TRADITIONAL METHODS OF ORGANIZING OR, more recently, "virtual" organizing through online communities. Transnational organizing may also mean that women in the developing world often have to embrace race or gender hierarchies that make solidarity difficult. In Southern Africa, due to the impact of globalization and neo-liberal economic policies, many countries have become destabilized, leading to large-scale migration across borders. This migration and competition for resources has resulted in a lack of solidarity between migrant and South African women on the local level and even xenophobic violence.

Global Women's Movements and Transnational Feminism: A View from the South

DR. AMANDA GOUWS

Introduction

As globalization continues to change people's lives through economic dislocation and restructuring, the movement of people and commodities across borders, and a greater reliance on information technology, further mobilization against globalization has increased as well. Women in particular have become part of the anti-globalization movement which highlights the predominantly negative impact globalization has on women around the world.¹ Dissatisfaction with globalization among women has its origins in local conditions but often finds an outlet on the global level.

Global processes may also create the space for a growing political or socio-economic movement to take on a transnational identity. Women's organizations, for example, typically remain rooted in national or local issues, but their strategies and objectives have much in common with those in other countries and may take on a supra-national form.²

As with local social movements, shifting politics may also create opportunities for movements on the transnational level. The ways in which political issues are framed locally often contribute to transnational movement formation.

Mackie suggests that transnational organizations form feminist linkages across borders where individual and collective identities are forged through feminist activism.³ This is important for creating counter hegemonic pressures that are beneficial for women's movements in their struggles against patriarchy.

Transnational Feminist Practices

Transnational organizing implies that women will organize on a level that crosses national borders. This may include women organizing in solidarity across the borders of different countries or it may include the organization of migrant women living in one country but organizing across borders to change conditions in their home country. This type of organization challenges the nation state that typically constitutes the boundaries of political action.⁴ With the destabilization of the nation state as a fixed territory of capital accumulation and identity formation, as well as a place of peoples' struggle against global forces, the global forum becomes a privileged space to create political meanings and strategies.⁵

Political Consequences

Often, the racial, gender, and class hierarchies typical of nation states become destabilized or exposed by transnational action through the influx of migrants from the South to the North.⁶ But the opposite is also possible. When women in different countries become represented by global movements, the plight of women in individual developing countries may be ignored due to internal contradictions, differences, and the oversimplification of key class, race, gender and nationality factors.⁷

Mendoza correctly points out that some of the consequences of transnational politics in Latin America were the decontextualization of local feminist struggles and the fragmentation along class and race lines and with regard to sexuality and ethnicity.⁸ It also led to the deradicalization of the feminist agenda.

Often a division of political labor occurs between the gender expert (frequently the femocrat) on engaging the global terrain, often without legitimization from local constituencies and the grassroots activist. As a result, women in the North often represent women in the South, and in developing countries middleclass women often speak on behalf of grassroots women.

Experience in South Africa

The forces of globalization had a similar impact on women's organizations in South Africa post-1994. The end of the transition from the system of apartheid to democracy, combined with the entry of South Africa into the arena of global neo-liberal economics, demobilized and fragmented the South African Women's National Coalition that consisted of hundreds of women's organizations. These organizations were active in the transitional phase through their activism and the creation of the Women's Charter for Effective Equality. Now women's organizations have become more intent on organizing in different sectors (such as gender-based violence, reproductive rights and poverty) through women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs), feminist networks, and community-based organizations.⁹

The shift from autonomous activist organizations to NGOs has changed the terrain for transnational organization. Some NGOs have established links in other Southern African Development Community states. The Black Sash, for example, has a legal assistance network, the Southern African Legal Assistance Network, which includes Angola, Swaziland, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Botswana and Namibia.¹⁰ But the national buy-in to "gender mainstreaming" as a discourse and practice has depoliticized women's activism to a great extent.

Internet Organizing

The virtual space of the Internet is important for organizing and mobilizing, but it also has the downside of excluding those who do not have access to technology, such as women in developing countries. As Mendoza points out, it is only when women and feminists in developing countries take their struggles

to the Internet (or the United Nations) that these struggles become significant.¹¹ The irony of this is that when women make their demands in cyberspace, their cause becomes significant in a *non-place*—the virtual space, where politics occur through flows, linkages, and circuits. The "NGO-ization" of the women's movement has been lamented by feminists who believe that it de-politicizes feminist issues.¹² The same problem occurs when demands are made in cyberspace: women who are not electronically linked (as is often the case in the South) cannot make their voices heard.

Nevertheless, the virtual space of the Internet is the life-blood of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), which has a chapter in South Africa. AWID builds the capacity of women both as individuals and as a collective unit within the global women's movement. Members of the organization are connected to global struggles, but the membership network is virtual. AWID represents the movement in different locations, where different groups have different constituencies that engage the state. Groups in different countries may be disconnected, but tactics and strategies "filter up" and "filter down." The biggest problem is accountability—how does the movement know that it is making a difference? How are outcomes measured?

One way of knowing how countries use AWID tactics and processes is by looking at the information and trend analysis which AWID supplies its members. An example is AWID's very successful "Where Is the Money for Women's Rights?" project that analyzes how countries spend aid and funding on women. AWID traces the money trail to see how women benefit. However, AWID does not do advocacy work.¹³

Challenges in Southern Africa

Women's transnational organization in Southern Africa has proven to be quite difficult to achieve in the absence of solidarity among women where access to resources is contested. In Africa, globalization has had detrimental impacts, such as the implementation of adverse economic policies, including structural adjustment programs, trade liberalization, and the

privatization of education and health services. This has contributed to the feminization of poverty.¹⁴ Globalization in many parts of Africa has resulted in the loss of livelihoods, unemployment, trafficking in women, homelessness, and a rupture of the social fabric which binds communities.¹⁵ Forty-four percent of the African population, of whom the majority is women, lives below the poverty line of US\$2 a day.

Migration

Many countries in Africa suffer from civil war and/or face famine, which contributes to the large-scale migration of people across borders. In Southern Africa, the implosion of the political and economic systems in Zimbabwe has sent millions of Zimbabweans across the border to South Africa in attempts to escape political killings and famine. These asylum seekers have, through a process of self-regulation, integrated themselves into South African communities. In the absence of government regulation, however, local South Africans, in a state of what has been labeled xenophobic violence, have attacked foreigners in the most brutal ways, killing at least 60 Zimbabweans in May 2008. Thousands of foreign nationals have been displaced and are now living in refugee settlements, primarily in tents. Since October 2008, the South African government has been demolishing the tents and forcing migrants to reintegrate with the South African population, causing the death of some. Women and children are the most vulnerable refugees; many were raped during the violence and continue to be exposed to gender-based violence in the camps. Refugee women lost their political rights in their countries of origin but cannot insist on rights in the countries where they are refugees. In conditions like these, transnational solidarity among women becomes imperative, yet it has remained elusive in South Africa.

Lack of Solidarity Among Women

MacDonald argues that it is difficult for women to work together on a transnational level because of the shifting universe of political discourse in each country, the variety of resources that have to be mobilized, and the need to link social movements to

as-yet unformed political groups or to third parties for success.¹⁶ Often, women's movements have to frame issues as legitimate concerns for their own members rather than those of transnational groups. While transnational organizations may have the ability to politicize issues across borders, they may not be able to mobilize women within the borders of an individual nation state. In the case of South Africa, local women have been complicit in using xenophobic language against Zimbabweans (such as referring to them as the *makwerekwere* (unwanted people)) and accusing them of stealing jobs (illegal foreign nationals are not protected by labor legislation and can therefore work for lower wages). In South Africa, which has a 40-percent unemployment rate,¹⁷ employment is a volatile issue.

There has been very limited solidarity between local South African women and women foreign nationals. The foreign nationals are assisted by South African NGOs, some of which are feminist organizations. The most visible activism for the improvement of the conditions of the foreign nationals has been by the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), a South African social movement organizing around issues of HIV/AIDS. Although most members of TAC are women, they are not in leadership positions, and gender issues such as the increasing spread of HIV/AIDS to women are not prioritized. When political demands become issue-based, they challenge the notion of identity politics and may erode feminist politics.

Reassertion of Tradition

In developing countries, globalization has led to the reassertion of traditional gender roles and contributed to strengthening ethnic or national identities. While this may also be the case in developed countries, the consequences are more dire in developing countries which are often trapped in a conflict between modern and pre-modern values. The reassertion of traditional gender roles as a coping mechanism in transnational contexts does not contribute to solidarity among women, but rather further divides women on all sides of the economic and geopolitical spectrum. In the case

of major population shifts, women from diverse ethnicities, geographies, and communities are pitted against one another.¹⁸ As Mendoza points out, transnational feminism may have exacerbated inequalities between women at the local level:

Transnational feminisms have not been able to deliver the bases for political solidarity between women across class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and national borders...[it] does not signify a form of consciousness more fit to negotiate the different positions and interests of women in the globalization context.¹⁹

As the experience of the foreign national women in South Africa shows, the conflict over resources divides local and migrant women and has a devastating impact on women's solidarity.²⁰

Conclusion

The criticism against "global sisterhood" is well known by now. The essentialist assumption that women will form a common bond across borders to fight gender inequality and injustice globally has been shown to be a myth. Solidarity cannot occur in the presence of hierarchies that put women in the West in positions of power while women in the South bear the brunt of the negative impact of globalization. But we need to be more critical of the concept of "women in the West"—where the West may be a geographic region of the privileged, developed world, most Western countries now have an influx of migrant women that are still positioned as the subaltern.

The hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality and culture found in the West are replicated in the divisions between citizens and migrant women in countries in the South, especially in contexts where nation-building occurs through a stronger emphasis on nationalism. Nationalism draws on traditional gender roles to mobilize women for the nation-building project. In the competition for scarce resources that has been aggravated by globalization, solidarity between women is not a natural

response. It is only by raising women's consciousness about global conditions that solidarity may be created. In this sense, the concept of "transversal politics" becomes important. Transversal politics implies that when women start to learn about the conditions of other women, there is a "rooting and shifting" that takes place to form the beginning of the understanding that is needed for solidarity. Transversal politics enables open dialogue and the acknowledgement of the partiality of one's own perspective. It also leads to a type of political agency resulting from understanding one's self as situated in a national location, acknowledging processes of migration and displacement.²¹

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ENDNOTES

- 1 The anti-globalization movement comprises a diverse range of movements that protest unfair and exploitative labor conditions, environmental destruction, bio-hazards, animal rights, social justice, oppressive regimes, and unjust wars. Most of these movements are opposed to neo-liberal capitalism, the power of multi-national corporations, and international monetary organizations because these organizations are deemed not to be subject to democratic accountability. Major anti-globalization demonstrations have occurred since the 1990s—for example, in Seattle, November 1999, at the World Economic forum in Davos in January 2000, and in general during meetings of the G8 countries, such as in London 2009 [www.answers.com/topic/anti-globalization (downloaded 12 April 2009)]. Women's conditions of exploitation and oppression are also protested, especially during the Global Feminist Dialogues that precede the World Social Forum meetings (see e.g., Gouws, 2007).
- 2 Moghaddam, 2000: 59-61.
- 3 Mackie, 2001: 189.
- 4 Ibid., 185.
- 5 Mendoza, 2002: 299.
- 6 In this article, the references to "South" versus "North" or "East" versus "West" are shorthand to indicate the socio-economic division between the more developed countries (typically the "North" and the "West") and the poorer developing countries (the "South" and the "East").
- 7 Mendoza, 2002: 305.
- 8 Ibid., 308.
- 9 Hassim, 2005.
- 10 Interview with Marcella Naidoo, Black Sash, 26 May 2006.
- 11 Mendoza, 2002: 300.
- 12 See e.g., Alvarez, 1999.
- 13 Interview with Shamilla Wilson, AWID (South Africa), 23 May 2007.
- 14 In this regard see Desai, 2002.
- 15 Adeleye-Fayemi, 2004: 39.
- 16 MacDonald, 2002: 152-153.
- 17 This definition of unemployment includes people who have given up looking for work.
- 18 Pritchett, 2005: 14.
- 19 Mendoza, 2002: 309.
- 20 South Africa has one of the widest gaps between rich and poor, with a Gini coefficient of 0.58. This gap has been aggravated by South Africa's neo-liberal economic policy, leading to an estimated 18 million South Africans living below the poverty datum line.
- 21 Eschle, 2002: 330-331.

SINCE THE EARLY 1990s, HONOR KILLINGS—THE MURDER BY FAMILY MEMBERS OF GIRLS AND WOMEN WHO ARE ACCUSED OF SEXUAL INDISCRETIONS—has increased and continues to increase. A transnational Kurdish women’s movement against honor killings, however, is making strides in changing both the laws and the social climate that permit these killings to continue. Despite some successes, the Kurdish women’s movement still faces many challenges, including the continuing rise in violence against Kurdish women, both in Iraq and in the Kurdish Diaspora.

The Transnational Kurdish Women's Movement Against Honor Killings

CLAIRE R. THOMAS

Introduction

The United Nations Population Fund estimates that honor killings—which have been described as “murders carried out by family members against girls and women who are believed to have committed a sexual indiscretion, or to have caused gossip related to sexual behavior, that besmirches the honor of the family”¹—take the lives of thousands of women each year.² While statistics for the specific number of women killed “in the name of honor” in Iraqi Kurdistan vary, it is clear that there has been an increase in violence against Kurdish women since the beginning of the 1991 Gulf War. Moreover, despite changes in Kurdish law to criminalize honor killings, such murders continue to rise in Iraqi Kurdistan and are even occurring in Kurdish diaspora groups in Sweden and the United Kingdom. In addition, since 2007, suicide by self-immolation has increased among Kurdish women, and these suicides are linked to pressure on women from family members to kill themselves for honor-related reasons.

The purpose of this paper is to explore honor killings of Kurdish women in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Kurdish diaspora to gain a better understanding of how the Kurdish women's movement helped shape the current battle against honor-related violence. Beginning with background information of the movement and the methods it has utilized to fight honor killings, this paper also examines the exile community and how Kurdish women in Sweden and the United Kingdom have yet to be instrumental in the fight against honor

killings, and moreover, have been victims of honor-related violence themselves. The paper also looks at new developments, such as the recent trend of suicides of Kurdish women by self-immolation and petitions by Kurdish women's organizations to the Kurdish government to end violence against women. Finally, the paper highlights some of the many ongoing challenges facing the Kurdish women's movement.

Social Conditions Conducive to Honor Killings

Activist Munira Muftizadeh of the Kurdish Women's Organization explained that violence against women originates from a patriarchal society “which fails to regard women's existence as full human beings.”³ In “No ‘Safe Haven’: Violence Against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan,”⁴ author Shahrzad Mojab reveals how honor killing in Kurdistan is condoned by social, economic, cultural, political, and religious structures.⁵ Mojab argues that six factors are primarily responsible for the increase in honor killings since the early 1990s. These factors include the deteriorating political, social, and economic framework of Kurdish society during wartime; the failure of political parties to make gender relations more equitable; the nationalist politics of gender relations; increased Islamic fundamentalism in politics; the revitalization of tribal and feudal relations; and finally, a weak feminist consciousness in Iraqi Kurdistan which allows nationalism to support the state's patriarchal role.

Background of the Movement

KWAHK

Founded in March 2000 in London, Kurdish Women Action against Honor Killing (KWAHK) works to raise international and national awareness about this heinous crime in Kurdish communities in Kurdistan and in the Diaspora.⁶ It evolved from the first organization to be established in response to violence against women in Kurdistan, the communist Independent Women's Organization.⁷ KWAHK is comprised of both Kurdish and non-Kurdish activists. With its slogan "No Honor in Murder," KWAHK's mission is two-fold. First, KWAHK "attempts to establish dialogue with human rights organizations, international NGOs, the United Nations and Western governments who contribute to combating gender based violence by refusing to support regimes and parties who are violating women's human rights."⁸ The second goal focuses on "identifying strategies and legal procedures most appropriate to the fight against different forms of violence against women."⁹

To achieve these goals, KWAHK has hosted public debates and conferences in both Iraqi Kurdistan and London to bring attention to the issue of honor killings as a human rights concern that requires national and international attention. A June 2000 Conference organized by KWAHK in London attempted to create a dialogue between the Kurdish community and political parties in Kurdistan on the issue of honor killings and on the status of women in society.¹⁰ Recommendations for future actions were grouped into three main categories: 1) legal action, including changing existing laws and thoroughly investigating all murder cases, 2) using education and the media to prevent acts of violence, and 3) establishing shelters, medical and counseling facilities as well as rehabilitation centers to protect women who are threatened with violence or have been victims of violence.¹¹ Organizational literature from KWAHK identifies these debates, as well as conferences at the United Nations and with the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, as

instrumental in changing Kurdistan's law to criminalize honor killings.

The Diaspora

The exile Kurdish community, mainly in Sweden and the United Kingdom, is also important to the rise of the transnational Kurdish women's movement against honor killings. Researchers Shahrzad Mojab and Rachel Gorman point out that "Kurdish feminists in the Diaspora have tried to introduce violence against women and gender inequality as central concerns in the process of reconstruction."¹² Iraqi Kurdish women activists like Nazaneen Rashid attest that Kurdish women are better able to advocate for women's rights from abroad because they do not need to be affiliated with political parties to secure funding and receive recognition. She explains:

I have traveled all over Europe to raise the voice of Kurdish women. I think I am contributing and advocating against the plight of Kurdish women more effectively while I am abroad than being in Kurdistan. I am free and I don't need to be affiliated with any of the political parties to have legitimacy. I have to admit that I am in the Diaspora, but in my heart and head I live in Kurdistan every day.¹³

Legal Reform and Shelters for Victims

The transnational Kurdish women's movement against honor killings has achieved two major successes to date. First, the movement was able to lobby both Kurdish governing political parties—the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)—to overturn articles in the Iraqi Penal Code that allowed for honor killings. It is important to note that the success of this campaign was due in large part to efforts made by women's organizations of the PUK and KDP in Kurdistan that were already in action at the time of KWAHK's formation. On April 12, 2000, the PUK passed Decree No. 59, which stated: "Lenient punishment for killing women or

torturing them with the pretext of purifying shame shall not be implemented. The court should not apply articles 130 and 132 of the Iraqi Penal Code no. 111 of the year 1969 to reduce the penalty of the perpetrator.”¹⁴

KWAHK was able to combine its advocacy efforts with NGOs on the ground in Kurdistan, such as the Swedish group Diakonia,¹⁵ as well as with the women's organizations of the PUK and KDP political parties, to overturn articles in the Iraqi Penal Code exonerating honor killers in the territory of the KDP. In 2002, the KDP passed Law No.14 which states: “Crimes against women with the pretext of ‘honorable motivation’ will not be legally liable for lenient punishment and Articles 28, 130 and 131 of the Iraqi Penal Code no. 111 of the year 1969 will not be implemented.”¹⁶

The transnational Kurdish women's movement against honor killings has also created shelters for women at risk. More shelters have been opening for women, particularly in Suleimaniya, that have been effective in preventing honor killings.¹⁷ In an 2004 article in *The Christian Science Monitor*, Nicholas Birch described how a young woman escaped from becoming a victim of honor killing to a shelter created by Diakonia on the outskirts of the city of Dohuk.¹⁸ Diakonia also helps the women who escape to the shelters find a future when they have no safe place to go and no income to sustain themselves.¹⁹

Recent Escalation of Violence

In spite of the reformation of the Iraqi Penal Code to criminalize honor killing in Iraqi Kurdistan, honor killings continue to escalate. The Kurdistan Human Rights Ministry reports that honor killings rose from 106 in 2005 to 266 in 2006.²⁰ Activists blame the Kurdish government for not doing enough to protect women. Researcher Shahrzad Mojab agrees that the law has been unsuccessful due to a lack of effective governance. Mojab cites one interviewee who stated, “while male killers did not hide themselves before the resolution, now they no longer show off, and it is therefore difficult to identify them.”²¹

A 2007 article entitled “Kurds Speak Out Against Honor Killing of Women” describes how Kurdish women activists in Erbil, Iraq, are using an art exhibit of instruments typically used in honor killings to educate the public about this horrific act.²² In one of the stories included in the exhibit, a 17-year-old girl named Do'a Khalil, from the Yazidi sect, was stoned to death for being in love with a Muslim boy. Men from her community used cinder blocks to crush her skull and recorded their actions with their cell phone cameras.²³ Chilura Hardi, the art exhibit organizer, “is trying to sustain the public outrage that followed Do'a Khalil's death and change a culture that condones violence against women.”²⁴ Hardi maintains that it is important to teach children at an early age that there is no difference between female and male in order for women to be seen as fully human.²⁵ While it has been challenging for Hardi to reach out to adult males in the community, she stated that she feels encouraged by comments from men who have attended the exhibit who assert that “any man who sees the exhibition will be changed.”²⁶

The horrific public killing of Do'a Khalil was the impetus behind a petition to the Kurdish Regional Government to enforce laws against honor-related violence. Entitled the “International Campaign against Killings and Stoning of Women in Kurdistan,”²⁷ the petition was instigated by Kurdish women in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Diaspora and to date has acquired over 15,000 signatures.²⁸ It calls for the Kurdish Regional Government to bring perpetrators of honor-related violence to justice and to create laws against the oppression of women, as well as to explicitly criminalize the act of stoning a person to death “to avoid this barbaric crime from becoming a norm and practice in Kurdish society.”²⁹

The rise of suicide among Kurdish women brings an additional dimension to the issue of honor killings. Activist Nazaneen Rashid and Dr. Katharine Hodgkin compiled a record of violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan that occurred in the month of May 2007. Their study includes honor killings as well as self-immolation, or suicide by fire. Rashid and Hodgkin assert that “suicide among

women in Kurdistan is commonly honor-related.”³⁰ There has been an increase in suicide in Iraqi Kurdistan since the reform of the Iraqi Penal Code to criminalize honor killings. In fact, in a February 2008 BBC News article, journalist Crispin Thorold reported on the alarming trend of self-immolation. Thorold reveals that due to “family problems,” on average one woman a day tries to take her own life in Kurdistan.³¹ Rashid and Hodgkin explain that in order to purify the family’s honor and to avoid persecution, women are pressured into committing suicide. Of the 44 incidents of violence against women listed in their report, 27 involve explosions or other mishaps with kerosene cookers.

Kurdish women in the Diaspora have also become victims of honor killing, as in the case of Fadime Sahendal, a Kurdish woman living in Uppsala, Sweden. In 2002, she was killed by her father because she refused to return to Turkey for an arranged marriage to a Kurdish man.³² Members of the Diaspora have also been affected by the social and political situation of Kurdistan. Reporter Lys Anzia contends that “the act of ‘statelessness’ for Kurdish women and girls, who live outside the Kurdish governing territory in Iraq, is a constant cultural issue.”³³ Dr. Ayten Adlim, as referenced in Anzia’s article, explains: “A high number of Kurdish migrant and refugee women in Europe suffer from psychological and physical health problems created by the experiences of violence, war and migration; often leading to Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD).”³⁴ It remains unclear whether this increase in health problems has led to an increase in suicides of Kurdish women.

Other Challenges for the Women’s Movement

In addition to the escalation of honor-related violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Diaspora in recent years, the Kurdish women’s movement against honor killings faces other challenges as well. One such challenge is obtaining funding from the international community. Because international women’s organizations often limit their financial support to women in

“third world” locations,³⁵ Kurdish women living in exile in developed countries, like many in the Kurdish Diaspora, have trouble securing funding. In addition, because Kurdistan is generally viewed as needing less international monetary aid than the rest of Iraq, funding from international donors is dwindling.³⁶

Diverse languages present another challenge for the Kurdish women’s movement. For example, members of Kurdish Women’s Rights Watch speak the Sorani and Kurmanji dialects of Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, and English.³⁷ Finding a common language understood by all members and usable on the internet, presents a problem. Moreover, there is increasing ethnic tension between Kurdish and Arab women. According to Brown and Romano, “many Kurdish women activists claim that Arab women refuse to listen to their Kurdish counterparts, seeing them as inferior, and refuse to accept that they hold more experience in women’s independent organizations and activities.”³⁸

Finally, the transnational nature of the Kurdish women’s movement also presents challenges. Although women’s groups from the PUK and the KDP played a significant role in changing the articles in the Iraqi Penal Code that condoned honor killings, these groups are clearly tied to political parties for support and legitimacy. Kurdish women’s groups in the Diaspora, however, have been able to fight against honor-related violence without relying on political parties for support. Nevertheless, the extent to which groups formed in the Diaspora continue to work with groups on the ground in Kurdistan is not clear. It could be argued that the movement would ultimately be more successful if the groups were unified and worked in collaboration to address the common problem of honor killing affecting Kurdish women, whether in Iraq or in the Diaspora.

Conclusion

It is clear that violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Kurdish Diaspora continues to be a problem despite increased dialogue on the issue and legal reform, raising questions about the effec-

tiveness of this women's movement. The early actions of the transnational Kurdish women's movement against honor killing achieved the goals of changing the Iraqi Penal Code and establishing shelters for victims. However, the escalation of violence in recent years, including suicide by women under family pressure for honor-related reasons, raises questions as to the effect of these early successes. Long-term success will depend on whether the movement is able to pressure the Kurdish Regional Government to enforce the laws providing for greater penalties for convicted honor killers, including family members who are accomplices to a woman's honor-related suicide. In addition, the women's movement must make sure that the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Constitution, which is currently being drafted and revised, includes the protection of women from honor-related violence.

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IN THE FIELD

Traditionally, this section highlights a perspective from one of Women for Women International's country offices. In this issue, we feature an article written by Seida Saric, Country Director of Women for Women International—Bosnia and Herzegovina. In it, she explains how, with the help of Women for Women International's programs and microcredit opportunities, Bosnian women are creating changes in their own lives at the grassroots level, that then lead to sustainable changes in their families, and communities and to a more equitable Bosnian society.

Building a Grassroots Women's Movement with Help from Abroad: Women for Women International in Bosnia and Herzegovina

SEIDA SARIC

Introduction

The strategy of Women for Women International (WfWI), which is headquartered in the United States and offers programs in eight countries, is to promote rights-based development by supporting women survivors of war as they take control in rebuilding their lives and communities. This approach stems from the belief that with adequate access to information, resources and opportunities, women can move from crisis and poverty to stability, self-reliance and active citizenship. Although WfWI works in widely varied regions and cultures and serves women of many different ethnicities and religions, WfWI's approach has always been simple: Extend a hand of financial and emotional support to one woman at a time while training her to help herself and fostering her awareness of women's rights. By addressing the realities of women's lives in this way, a women's movement can take root and grow in even in the most challenging circumstances. WfWI believes that, given the opportunity, one woman can accomplish anything, but bring women together, and they can accomplish everything.

WfWI's first program was established in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in 1993 in the midst of war. Since that time, the thousands of women WfWI

has served in Bosnia and Herzegovina have formed businesses, developed vocational skills, learned about their rights, and taken leadership roles in their communities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of six republics of the former Yugoslavia. The population belonged to three major ethnic groups: Bosnian Muslims (also referred to as Bosniaks), Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs. The country is mostly landlocked between Croatia and Serbia, and it is named "Bosnia and Herzegovina" because it is comprised of two regions, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia, in the north, occupies approximately 80 percent of the country; Herzegovina, in the south, occupies approximately 20 percent.

When the fighting started in 1992, I worked providing humanitarian relief services to the elderly. For nearly four years, Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic, and the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, Radovan Karadzic, launched a hate-filled propaganda campaign to revitalize Serb nationalism. Bosniaks were portrayed as dangerous fundamentalists that needed to be removed. Over 100,000 people were killed; millions were terrorized and displaced. Systematic rape was used as a weapon of war and women and girls were forced into rape camps

while their husbands and sons were murdered. It is estimated that 20,000–50,000 Bosnian Muslim women were raped. Genocide and forced impregnation were used as tools of ethnic cleansing. Sixty percent of all homes in Bosnia, half of the schools, and one-third of the hospitals were damaged or destroyed. Such a horrific conflict created deep rifts in Bosnian society.

After almost four years of this hell, much of BiH was destroyed, and the population was deeply divided. During the war, I saw things that made me question how I, my family, and my country would ever recover. As Safeta Kulic, a 36-year-old mother of two who has since graduated from Women for Women International in Bosnia and Herzegovina, explained: “They brought me to an abandoned house and tore my clothes off. One soldier held a gun in my mouth while the other raped me, and then the other did the same. Then one soldier told the other to kill me. His response was: ‘I don’t need to. She’ll soon kill herself.’”

When the Bosnian war ended in 1995, the country needed to be rebuilt. In a country where women had traditionally been excluded from public life, the notion that this burden would fall to the women — because so many of the men had been killed or injured in the war — was overwhelming. But there was no other choice. This was a turning point borne of necessity, but I now know that it was also an opportunity.

Our Programs

Traditionally in Bosnia and Herzegovina, women — especially those in rural and suburban communities — were excluded from public life; their only roles were in the home. Women were often closed off from society, rarely leaving their homes and having no connections to other women. WfWI started working in Bosnia in 1993 during the war in Sarajevo. In the first year, 14 women — displaced from their homes and with missing husbands — were matched with sponsors in America who sent money each month and exchanged letters with their new Bosnian sisters. These early WfWI participants were most concerned with immediate

survival: finding food, shelter, clothing and information about missing relatives, and dealing with the trauma of rape and other horrors. The letters they exchanged with their sponsors became a global lifeline of humanity and hope that bridged their isolation and helped to alleviate their suffering.

In 1997, the organization began offering micro-credit loans to help women access capital to start businesses. As WfWI gained experience in Sarajevo, the staff came to understand that financial assistance alone was not enough to create deeper change in the lives of women who had suffered the effects of war. In 1998, WfWI created a one-year program in addition to sponsorship, enrolling 400 women in rights awareness, life skills and vocational training. WfWI hoped to help women gradually build the strength and stature they needed to become active members of their communities. The program was officially registered as a local NGO in 1998, and I was hired as the Director.

In 2000, the program expanded beyond Sarajevo to more rural and isolated areas in the central and eastern regions of the country where the needs were great and transportation was scarce. The programs in BiH include Sponsorship, Rights Awareness and Life Skills Curriculum, Vocational and Technical Skills Development, and Income Generation Assistance. Participants in the Rights Awareness and Life Skills Curriculum meet regularly with their Women’s Group, a group of approximately 20 women, for the training sessions. Another component of the program, vocational skills development, builds on and strengthens women’s existing skills and introduces new skills in traditional and non-traditional fields so that women can access future employment opportunities.

Although the war officially ended in 1995, the socially excluded women we serve continue to face challenges to improving their lives and becoming active citizens in their communities. Additionally, there is much variation between different regions in terms of the long-term effects of the war. In Srebrenica, for example, where an estimated 8,000 men and boys were massacred within a few days, women still

experience intense trauma years later. Much of the country remains divided along ethnic lines.

Microcredit Program

After the war, the Bosnian economy changed from being state-run to one that is open to private investment and enterprise. The transition to a market economy made reconstruction even more complicated because there was no state-provided security to fall back on. The state plays a much smaller role in providing jobs and a social safety net—a difficult adjustment for many women. To provide women with new alternatives to earn an income and support their families — both immediately and for the long term — WfWI–BiH began a microlending program in 1997. Starting a business is something new and perhaps non-traditional for most Bosnian women, yet for many of the women WfWI–BiH serves, it is an important route to financial sustainability.

To facilitate the creation of women-run businesses, WfWI – BiH provides not only microfinance capital but business start-up advisory services and, perhaps most importantly, identification and development of larger and international markets to help women sell their products.

In a place like BiH where most of the country is rural and there are few or no large employers as a result of widespread destruction during the war, starting or working for a small business is often the only way that women can earn an income. By helping Bosnian women access the opportunities, knowledge and resources to start or grow small businesses that thrive, women can then provide employment to others in the community. For example, Lucia, who has been a WfWI microcredit client for 10 years, was able to start a business making and canning red pepper puree. Now her business is so successful that she employs the whole village. All women need is one chance and they will show everybody in their community what is possible and they will become a vital resource for their communities.

Today, WfWI–BiH works with more than 3,000 women, and over 17,000 women have graduated from its program since 1998. The microcredit program, which became a separate legal entity in

2001, has provided loans to nearly 20,000 women since 1997.

Bringing Women Together

In the last 11 years, I have seen many positive changes not just in women's lives but in their families and communities as well. I have seen how women who come to the program feeling helpless, alone and uncertain about their future join a group of other women, begin to learn about their rights and develop vocational skills to generate an income. These women are literally transformed. They become each other's support system, they talk about their rights together and what "rights" truly means in their lives. They practice speaking up for themselves and each other, in a safe space. They form businesses together that employ others in the community and help to jumpstart the local economy. The women begin to ask questions about how to improve their communities and bring services to their neighbors. As women begin to see themselves differently, it changes the way they are regarded by others. Anka Blazevic, a 48-year-old mother of three and WfWI–BiH program participant talked about this: "When I heard about Women for Women International, I was so happy because women are able to help each other, and there is someone all over the world, far, away, thinking about you and taking care of you. Being in these meetings with other women, we are able to help each other."

Begzada Salkic said, "Women for Women was my source for a better future. I can earn a living from what they helped me to learn, and I always have something to do: crochet. I don't want to sit and wait for hand-outs. I want to do something for myself and my family." Igbala Gabela said that "I felt myself become stronger and not willing to give up as long as I could. I always say to myself that I can do more and better, because of the many examples of women [from WfWI] who never gave up."

The greatest value of our program is bringing women together. Before WfWI came to Bosnia, there were women who did not know anyone in their communities and did not have any support. By bringing women together, we gave women the

chance to share their experiences and learn from each other. Slowly, as women gain skills and self-confidence and become experienced in making a living and engaging with local leaders, they become leaders and teachers themselves. Women formed new networks, creating a new public face of Bosnian society — one that includes women.

Community Activism

The biggest step in improving women's lives was helping them leave their homes; by getting out of the house, women were able open their eyes and gain a sense of confidence and purpose beyond traditional roles. Women go through the WfWI program one phase at a time, learning new skills or improving existing skills for income generation, learning about their rights, building community-based groups, and engaging with local governments to advocate for women and their communities. Each time a woman finishes a program she is ready for a new way of living.

Although some Bosnian women have achieved high levels of professional success, most still struggle against traditional attitudes and other barriers that limit active involvement in their communities. Some program graduates have taken pioneering steps toward challenging these obstacles by forming local associations. These groups have lobbied for community changes such as improved transportation, organized services such as road repair and trash removal, campaigned for awareness of women's health issues, held fairs to sell their products, and elected their own members to local councils. These are important steps toward mobilizing a critical mass of women with the power to make a difference in Bosnia and Herzegovina's continued development.

When women in the village of Vranduk completed the WfWI program, they continued to meet as a group. They built up their self-confidence and self-respect and rebuilt their strength by sharing both their problems and achievements with one another. They convinced other women to join the WfWI program and became involved in social, economic, and political events in their community. A group of women formed a Women's Association

that convinced the local mayor to allow them to organize and run the annual traditional Cherry Festival in Vranduk. The festival was a great success, with women from other communities coming in busloads to support the organizers and participate. Once given the chance, the women proved their true capabilities.

Additionally, bringing women together has had a profound impact on their children. Formerly in BiH, women and girls typically stayed at home while boys and men would go to school. Now women are aware of the importance of education and have the means to send their children to school. And children, especially girls, are proud of their mothers' accomplishments and have hope and anticipation for what they will do in the future.

Conclusion

The changes we have seen in BiH are the changes that build a movement. Individual women who are empowered with skills and knowledge of their rights join together and create sustainable changes in their lives and in their communities.

The first step in creating strong societies is creating strong women. Active women enhance democracy by becoming active citizens who work with local governments to bring their villages essentials such as clean water, electricity, and education and remove gender-based barriers to equal opportunity. Helping women helps the community, which helps rebuild Bosnian society and sustain the fragile peace.

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ABOUT WOMEN FOR WOMEN INTERNATIONAL

Since 1993, Women for Women International has provided women survivors of war, civil strife, and other conflicts with tools and resources to move from crisis and poverty to stability and self-sufficiency, thereby promoting viable civil societies. The organization provides services that aim to address participants' short-term economic needs while enhancing and building their capacity to create long-term economic solutions. In the process, participants also receive intensive training in women's economic, social, and political roles and value in society. This strategy stems from Women for Women International's conviction that economic solutions are not sustainable unless they are paired with active participation in social and political discourse.



2006 Recipient of the
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